

SERMONS

O N

Several Occasions.

By the Late Reverend

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to His MAJESTY.

VOL. II.



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L O N D O N,

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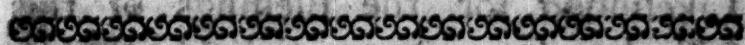
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SERMON I.



JOB xi. 18.

*And thou shalt be secure, because
there is Hope; yea, thou shalt
dig about thee, and thou shalt
take thy Rest in Safety.*



THE Text is address'd to Job
by Zophar one of his Friends;
whose general Drift was to
reprove him for justifying
himself before God, to represent to him
the Unsearchableness of God's Judg-
ments, and thence to persuade him to

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humble

humble himself in the Sight of his Maker; to prepare his Heart, and to stretch out his Hands towards him: In short, to seek to him in the Offices of Religion; and above all, with a Conscience void of Offence, and by a pure and blameless Conversation. For that then, whatever his outward Circumstances might be, he might depend upon the divine Protection and Favour; in all Likelihood for the Blessings of this Life, but more unexceptionably for the Completion of his Hope beyond them. This is the Import of that whole Passage to which my Text stands more immediately connected from the 13th Verse down to it.

“ If (says *Zophar* to *Job*) thou prepare thine Heart, and stretch out thy Hands towards him; if Iniquity be in thine Hand, put it far away, and let not Wickedness dwell in thy Tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy Face without Spot; yea thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear: Because thou shalt forget thy Misery, and remember it as Waters that
“ pass

“ pass away. And thine Age shall be
 “ clearer than the Noon Day; thou shalt
 “ shine forth, thou shalt be as the
 “ Morning. *And thou shalt be secure,*
 “ *because there is Hope; yea, thou shalt dig*
 “ *about thee, and thou shalt take thy Rest*
 “ *in Safety.*”

Which Words represent to us the comfortable State of that Man, who has God for his Protector and Friend; the Security and Safety which there is in his Service.

He shall be secure, because there is Hope; i. e. whatever may be the present Portion of his Lot, he needs not be anxious for the future; for *that* he may be easy, because he has such comfortable Ground of Expectation from it.

If he enjoys the Blessings of Life, he may enjoy them securely, he has great Reason to expect their Continuance, and that the Providence of God will protect him from all pernicious and fatal Accidents. He may dig about him, and may dwell in Safety. Whereas the last Verse of the Chapter informs us the Reverse of this is the Case of the

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Ungodly; *The Eyes of the Wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their Hope shall be as the giving up of the Ghost.*

This only should be observ'd, as the Fault of *Zophar* in his Opinion of this Matter, that what was with great Reason to be expected from the general Course of God's Providence, he made an invariable Rule of judging and censuring in each single Instance; as if a Man were always and unexceptionably to be pronounced unrighteous, who was either not furrounded with the Favours of Fortune; or remarkably signalized by her Frowns and Displeasures.

The Text however stands good; and I shall endeavour from it, to represent the Advantage of Religion upon this particular Topic, of the Security and Safety annex'd to it.

If any should yet be unconvinced of this, I think I may venture to argue with them upon their own Principles; and to suppose with them in the

I. *First*

I. *First* Place, that the Recompences of Vice and Virtue were dubious; that the Sanctions of the Gospel were not so ascertain'd, as to exclude all Scruple and Distrust concerning them: Even upon this Supposal, I shall shew, that Religion would be much the safest Side of the Question.

II. *Secondly*, I observe, that in the favourable Circumstances of Life and Fortune, the good Man is best qualified for enjoying them with the least Alloy; the least Apprehension of a Change for the worse.

III. *Thirdly*, That in the Misfortunes of Life, he has the Support of the brightest Hopes.

IV. *Fourthly*, That both in the Misfortunes and Felicities of his present State, he has all imaginable Assurances of Favour, with the great Governour of the World, and the supreme Disposer of all Events.

I. *First* then, Upon a Supposal that the Recompences of Vice and Virtue

were dubious, and that the Sanctions of the Gospel were not ascertain'd, beyond all Possibility of Distrust and Scruple concerning them; yet even, upon this Supposal, Religion is (I say) by far, the safest Side of the Question.

Now when we are considering the *Danger* or the *Safety* which respectively belongs to Vice or Virtue; in order to a just Representation of this Matter, we must take into our Account, the Risques and Prospects on both Sides; what it is which the *Man of Religion*, and the *Man of no Religion*, do respectively venture, and what on each Side is the propounded Recompence. I begin with the Risques and Prospects of Religion. And, I believe, it will appear, that its *Risques* (if any) are small and inconsiderable; and its *Prospects* vast and very promising,

Its Risques, I say, if any, are small and inconsiderable; they are *ordinarily* so *in themselves*, and *always* so *upon the Comparison*. *Ordinarily* the righteous Man is at least as much entitled to the Blessings of this Life, as the Wicked and Un-

godly;

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godly; so that he does not merely for the Sake of his Righteousness, risque any Stake which is worth his saving. If he be forced to baulk some Lusts and Passions, or to drop an advantageous Pretension to the Favours of Fortune; how highly soever the Gratification of those Demands may be rated by a partial Judgment, the true Value of them is mightily depreciated by the apparent Mischiefs which are known to attend them. It has been my Endeavour in some former Discourses to convince you, that Religion is no such Enemy to our present Interests, as it has been sometimes represented; so that it is not ordinarily so in the stated Course of Things, whatever it may sometimes be in rare and trying Junctures. I think it of great Importance to the Cause of Virtue, that it should have this Testimony; for tho' the Consideration of a *future* Recompence, be in Reason and Justice infinitely the most esteemable, yet if *Godliness* has the *Promise of this Life* besides, and the Blessings of our present State be added moreover to it; this will remove a great Part of

the Prejudices conceiv'd against it, when the Men of the World shall find in good Earnest, that it is no such shocking Enterprize to venture upon Religion; that it is only to live like reasonable Beings with some Command over Appetite and Passion, some Regard to God, as the Creator and Lord of all Things, and some Respect to their Neighbour, as a Part of his Workmanship, to whom, and from whom, are due those reciprocal Offices of Justice and Charity, which may render this World a sociable Place, and fit to be inhabited, by Creatures endowed with Knowledge and Understanding. For the rest; to live as peaceably and pleasantly as Fortune and Providence shall furnish the Opportunities and the Means of living.

I said therefore at my Entrance upon this Head; that the Risques of Religion, if any, were small and inconsiderable; for in what has been hitherto represented, there is nothing which can with any Propriety be called a Venture; no Sacrifice made which is either burdensom or costly. Those Lusts and Passions, or those Opportunities of secular Advantage,

Advantage, which a good Conscience may sometimes oblige us to resist, or to forego, are always, in themselves, discommended from a Set of ill Consequences, which follow the indulging them.

But lest this should in some Cases be thought a Grievance (as Cases at last there are and may be, wherein this will be esteemed a Grievance) I added, that as the Risques of Religion were *ordinarily in themselves* but small and inconsiderable; so *upon the Comparison* they were *always* so. I meant that in Comparison with its *Prospects*, its *Risques* were always inconsiderable.

Here Religion claims no further Observance, than what Men chuse to submit to in Things of a like Nature. A very encouraging Prospect deserves a proportionable Venture. So Men think, and so they act, in the common Commerce and Dealings of the World. They do not insist upon downright Demonstration for the Certainty of their Success in what they aim at. They know full well that if they did, they might starve right wisely, before they could compass

compass it. If the Appearances be fair; if they be such as generally satisfy the Men, who look most *into* them; especially, if the Venture be small, and the Recompence very inviting; there is no Man who stands debating vigorously for more and more Evidence, or refuses such reasonable and promising Conditions. We desire no more, in the Business of Religion; nay we need not so much. For,

If the Prospect be not greater, and better ascertained; if the Venture be not less, as well as less considerable, in the Case of Religion, than it is in the ordinary Traffick of Life; we give up the Cause, and will no longer press it.

But if Religion promises for the General, a pleasant and easy Passage thro' this Life; and always a State of infinite and endless Bliss and Glory beyond it; if it promises this, upon Reasons as firm and unexceptionable, as the Nature of the Case and of such Proofs will admit; if with all this vast Encouragement, it requires, for the Main, no other

ther Sacrifice, than of such Indulgences, as would be injurious either to ourselves or others; what Account can be given of that monstrous Indifference, where-with the Notice of so great a Gain is commonly entertained? Into any Proposals of secular Advantage, Men run with a Zeal and Promptitude, which speak the Concern they have for a near and darling Interest.

Now here is an Interest infinitely more important, propounding Terms more advantageous, which yet can scarce have Audience, or make any vigorous Impression upon the Minds of those it is address'd to.

So fatal and strong an Influence, have the *Things which are seen*, above the *Things which are not seen*; and therefore 'twas fit that the *one* should be but *temporal*, whilst the *other* should be *eternal*.

Thus far we have considered the *Risques* and *Prospects* of Virtue; and we have seen upon the whole, *that he that walketh uprightly walketh surely*; he takes the safest Side of the Question, he may dwell safely, and be quiet from the Fear of Evil;

vil; for when *this* Life ends, he *cannot* be much *worse*, tho' he *may* be a great deal *better*.

Let us now proceed to consider, on the other Hand, the *Prospects and Risques* of Vice and Irreligion. And here, I believe it will appear, that the *Prospects* in this Case are as inconsiderable, as in the other they were *promising*; and the *Risques* as *dangerous* and *fatal*, as *there* they were *mean* and *trivial*.

Its *Prospects*, I say, can seldom or never be considerable. Whatever Promises Vice may make its Votaries, fall miserably short in the Performance. Like that Fiction of our famous Poet, concerning a vain Attempt of the fallen Angels to taste a delusive Appearance of the forbidden Fruit, when instead of it, they found their Taste deluded with bitter Ashes: So Vice may promise them Pleasure, but it will pay in Pain; it may promise Content and Satisfaction from this or that imaginary Good; but it will requite them with Shame and Remorse; with the Torment of restless and endless and vain Desire. 'Till the Principles of
a Man

a Man are entirely subdued, there is something monstrous and shocking in the Ways of Sin; when he has obtain'd of himself to commit it without Disturbance from his Conscience, yet still the Way will seldom be smooth *without*, tho' it should be so *within*. The Man will meet with various Impediments from *others* in the Prosecution of his naughty Purpose, who feels perhaps none from his *own* Breast; and always with the Discountenance and Disesteem of those, whose Esteem and Countenance are in any Measure valuable: So that the *Prospects* of Sin with Regard to this Life (which yet is its only Scene of Comfort) are dark and gloomy; it can hardly promise (tho' it is better much at promising than performing, yet, I say, it can hardly so much as promise) any sure or lasting Happiness. Its Aims are so wild and fantastick, and the Means for compassing them, so involv'd and intricate, that even upon *present* Regards it were usually better to take into the plain and open Road of Integrity and Virtue; better to content ones self with *lawful* Pleasures,

fures, than by seeking *unlawful* ones, to pay double for them, both before and afterwards with Shame and Pain. Now if the *Prospects* of Sin, with Regard to *this* Life, are so dark and gloomy, and promise so little of what is truly valuable; with Regard to the *next* they are infinitely worse; and will not (with all their forward Pretensions) undertake for any thing, but for poor Annihilation; *i. e.* to leave the Sinner, *after Death* just what they found him, *before he had Life.*

And will they indeed undertake for this? No! it is the Sinner's Misery, that they cannot! They cannot undertake to screen him from the Hand of the just Avenger; or to stay the consuming Fire of his Wrath!

Mean while, I say, the utmost of the Wicked's *Prospect* is to have an End of all Prospect, to have all their Hopes and Fears determine with the Breath of their Nostrils! And is not this a pitiful and narrow Prospect, for Men, who with their utmost Industry cannot avoid the looking beyond a Grave, and thinking sometimes (tho' they labour to think

think of nothing less, than) of a Resurrection and Eternity? Is it not a manifest Degradation of human Nature to level it thus with the brutal; and limit a Mind to the little Confines of this World, which was plainly made to stretch into another, and to expect Immortality? What is there at last in Sin, which can possibly compensate for the Defeat of this glorious Hope? What, which can requite them for the Loss of so great Salvation?

Were not the Sinner abandon'd to the Loss of common Understanding, he would never rest content with such a foolish Bargain; where the *Gain* is so little, and the *Loss* so great. Hitherto

We have considered how poor and contemptible the *Prospects* of Sin are; and have seen that they are no Way comparable to those of Religion.

Let us proceed to the *Risque* and Venture the Sinner must submit to, who resolves to persist in his wicked Courses.

Now this is no less than to encounter the Wrath of God, and to arm Divine Justice against his own Soul. The Sinner

ner should consider, that the Reasons which support this *fearful looking for of Judgment*, are such as highly deserve his Attention and Regard; what he has nothing to except to, but the Laughter of a Fool, in a Case of the utmost and most serious Consequence. For, alas! it is a small Abatement of a reasonable Fear, to suggest, that *possibly* it *may* prove groundless. The Man, for all this, is in a dismal Condition, who has nothing but a mere Possibility to save him from endless Torments; and even *that* attended with the ugly Circumstance of everlasting Non-existence! But,

Consider, vain *Man*, whilst there is Time to consider, that thou art pleading all this while for the Privilege of a Beast, and giving up the most valuable Interests of human Nature. Remember too, that the *Reality of Things* is too stiff and inflexible to bend to the Sophistry of *idle Words*: That Heaven and Hell are built upon too firm Foundations, to be blown away, with every Breath of Wind, which shall be raised against them. This is the Sinner's prodigious Venture; and

and these are respectively the *Risques and Prospects of Vice and Virtue.*

Granting therefore, to the Man of no Religion, the utmost of what he can with any Colour contend for; that the Recompences of Vice and Virtue are not ascertain'd beyond all Possibility of Scruple and Distrust concerning them; yet still, you see, the Man of Religion has incomparably the *safest* Side of the Question. He has provided for Eternity, because he has such infinite Reason to believe himself made for it; whereas the *other* has utterly neglected this Provision; because he apprehends it just possible, that he may never live to see it.

I have done with the main Point I intended to speak to upon this Subject, and proceed to observe more briefly under my

II. *Second Particular*; That in the favourable Circumstances of Life and Fortune, the good Man is best qualified for enjoying them with the least Allay; the least Apprehension of a Change for the worse.

An *Hand-writing upon the Wall* was
 VOL. II. C enough,

enough, we find, to spoil the Jollities of *Belsbazzar's Banquet*. Such an *Hand-writing* might every wicked Man read upon his own Breast, would he allow himself to look into it. *Man, thou art mortal, and must die, and must thence to Judgment*, is the common Sentence upon the Sons of Men, whether they be good or bad. Yet is there a vast Disparity in this common Sentence. To the Righteous it is no Abatement of their present Felicities, that they must exchange them one Day for others, which shall be brighter and more perfect. So that they may go on to pursue their innocent Enjoyments, without any Contradiction from their own Minds; without those Allays of Disquiet and dark foreboding, which must mix with and vitiate the most entertaining Scenes of the Wicked's Happiness.

They are sure, *when this Mortal shall put on Immortality*, that that Immortality will be blessed and triumphant; and that comfortable Hope will balance a good deal against those natural Fears of Death and Dissolution, which otherwise were
 enough

enough to jar the most harmonious Conjunction of this World's Blessings.

Whereas the Wicked, even upon their own Principles, are entirely destitute of this cordial Preservative. The more pleasing Life is; and the more abounding with Comforts; the more melancholy (one would think) should be the Thought of parting with it. Now, if there be nothing to set against *this*, no Hope beyond the Grave to lighten this heavy Burden, and to clear up this gloomy Prospect; one would suspect, I say, that it should sink the Man who must endure it, and entirely deprive him of all Enjoyment. This is manifestly the Case of those who have no Resources of Comfort beyond the *present* Scene: Since when the *present* fails them, they are then, *at best*, to be for ever in a State incapable of Comfort; and (which is highly moreover credible and terrible) in a State of insupportable and endless Woe. But now,

3. *Thirdly*, So great is, in this respect, the Difference between the Case of the good Man and the wicked, that, where-

as the *latter* can scarce bear up amidst all the Affluences of a prosperous Fortune; the *former* (amidst the greatest Infelicities of Life) has the Support of the brightest Hopes.

Pfal. xciv.
19.

In the Multitude of my Thoughts within me (says the Psalmist, or as the Translation of our *Psalter* renders it) *In the Multitude of the Sorrows which I had in my Heart, thy Comforts have refreshed my Soul.*

The severest Pinches of Adversity are improv'd by a religious Disposition, into Occasions of weaning us from the World, and of turning us to God; of strengthening our Faith, and of elevating our Hope, and of enlarging our Spirits towards the Father of them. Hence arises that spiritual Joy, that Patience and Consolation and inward Peace, which as much exceed all earthly Blessings, as they do surpass all Understanding, and all Expression. So that the smarter the Strokes of Fortune may be, and the deeper Impressions they may happen to make; the stronger Perception there is of that fatherly Visitation, which would not
chasten

chasten, if it did not *love*. Mean while,

The Man of Religion is sure, that a Time is coming, which will render the Subject of his present Complaints the Matter of endless Joy and Exaltation to him; he knows that an exceeding eternal Weight of Glory, is the settled Recompence of well-endured Affliction, and hence is enabled not only to bear it with Resignation, but even with some Sparklings of spiritual Refreshment, and some bright Forebodings of a joyful Hope. He is sensible, that his Way is preparing, by the Discipline of a wise and gracious Providence, towards the utmost Perfection of which his Nature is capable; and for the *Means* made use of towards so good an *End*, he willingly leaves them to the Appointment of infinite Wisdom and Goodness. So that the Calamities of Life lose much of their Sting, when they fall upon a Mind so prepared to receive, and so enabled to support them.

But now he who has all his Happiness, and all his Prospects on *this* side the Grave, is miserably disappointed, when *these* are defeated.

If on *this* Side his Prospects be black and gloomy, the Darkness will thicken upon him on the *other*, and leave him quite benighted in the Horrors of a melancholy desponding Mind. Whatever the sanguine, gay Voluptuary may at present think of it; the Time will come, when he shall feel the Want of religious Comforts, and would purchase them, if he could, at the Expence of all his *(then past, which now are his present)* Enjoyments; when the neglected Favour of God would be of more Use and Importance to him than all the other Blessings of Life and Fortune. But the Things which belong to his Peace will then, perhaps, be hidden from his Eyes, because he wilfully shut them, when he should have used them.

4. *Fourthly* and *Lastly*, What mightily heightens the good Man's Security, both in the Misfortunes and Felicities of his present State, is the Assurance he has of Favour with the great Governour of the World, and the supreme Disposer of all Events.

Can

Can that Man be anxious for the Issues of Fortune, who knows his best Friend is at the Helm of Government, one who thoroughly understands his Interests, is fittest to design, and ablest to compass for him.

Thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid, as the Verse has it, which immediately succeeds the Text, agreeably to what the holy Psalmist hath expressed of his Confidence in God; *I will lay me down in Peace, and take my Rest; for it is thou, Lord, only, who makest me dwell in Safety.* Job xi. 19. Psal. iv. 19.

Secure of the Divine Protection and Favour, a Man may boldly bid Defiance to the greatest Dangers. Those which most threaten Life, open at the same Time the delightful Prospect of a nearer Intercourse with the God of his Salvation.

If it seems good to the Will of his heavenly Father to continue him longer, upon the present Scene; and to favour him with the Opportunities of promoting his Maker's Glory; he is sure to use and cultivate the inestimable Bene-

fit, and so is still adding to the Reasons and Grounds of his own Security.

All this to the Wicked is just the contrary; Prosperity is lost upon him, and Adversity hardens and enrages him. Neither the one nor the other produces either the Acknowledgment of a grateful, or the Resignation of an humble Soul. So that he cannot in the *one* be secure from a Change for the *worse*; nor in the *other* expect an Alteration for the *better*. But the Comforts of Life are darkened by the Prospect of their approaching Discontinuance, without any Hope beyond 'em; and the Misfortunes of it aggravated, by the Fear of greater which may come hereafter.

We see therefore, that, whatever Circumstance or Station of Life may be allotted us, Religion is necessary to carry us thro' it with Satisfaction and Comfort. *Without* it, there is neither Peace nor Safety: *With* it no Danger, which ought to terrify, nor Trouble, which, without our Fault, can overwhelm us. When God is our Protector and Shield, and Heaven our Hope and Confidence of Rejoicing;

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Rejoicing; these are such firm Supports, as can never fail to buoy up our Spirits, in all the Perils and Adversities of our present State. And when we are under an humble Sense of our Dependence upon a superior Power; no Felicities of Fortune, can make us insolent, or forgetful of the Hand which gives and takes away. Through all the Changes and Chances of this mortal Life, we shall steddily make to the Haven where we would be; and at length, thro' the Mercies of God in *Christ Jesus*, attain, we trust, to everlasting Salvation.

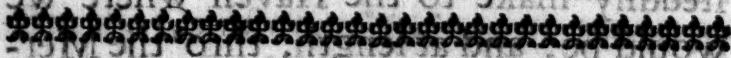
May we all at length (thro' those infinite Mercies) so pass the Waves of this troublesome World, that finally we may come to the Land of eternal Life, there to reign with thee, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, World without End. Amen.

S E R M O N



SERMON II.

Preach'd in *Lent.*



2. PET. iii. 18.

But grow in Grace —



THE Text very pertinently and properly follows up-
on the preceding Advice;
as being indeed of great
Importance to insure the
Success of it.

*Beware (says the Apostle) lest ye also
being led away with the Error of the Wick-
ed, fall from your own Stedfastness.*

But on the contrary, as the best Ex-
pedient to prevent your Defection from
the

the Ways of Godliness, be always endeavouring to gain new Ground, and to make a continual Progress in the Course of your Duty: *Grow in Grace.*

The most usual Signification we meet with in the New Testament of the Word *Grace*, is the Favour and Mercy of God reveal'd to Mankind in the Gospel of his Son.

The Word itself denotes mere Favour; but as it is a technical Term, it means what was mention'd, the Favour of God discover'd to us in the whole Economy of our Redemption. Thus

when it is said, that we *are saved by Grace*; that we *have good Hope given us thro' Grace*; that we are *Heirs of the Grace of Life*; these Expressions do manifestly denote that peculiar Mercy of God display'd to us in every Part of his blessed Son's Undertaking. From whence also it comes to signify that Undertaking it self, which being fraught in every Branch of it with Grace and Mercy, is represented by Way of Eminence under the Title of *Grace*.

Eph. i. 8.

2 Theff. ii.

16.

1 Pet. iii. 7.

Now

Now to *grow in this Grace*, is to improve in the Knowledge and Practice of this Religion; *grow in Grace* (says our Apostle) and in the *Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. The latter illustrates and explains the former; so that the Words (tho' few) are exceedingly pregnant and expressive; as containing the whole Progress of a Christian's Life, from his first setting out in the Ways of Godliness, to the Conclusion of them in eternal Blessedness. They represent him advancing from one Degree of Improvement to another; from the Pangs of the second Birth, and the very lowest Beginnings of Virtue, to the Perfection of his Growth and Manhood, to the *Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ*.

My Business shall be, in the Sequel of this Discourse,

I. To mark out the several Steps and Stages of the Christian's Progress, as he grows in Grace, and advances in the Duties of his holy Calling.

II. Se,

II. *Secondly*, To represent the Necessity and the Advantage of such his Growth, and such his Improvement.

III. *Thirdly*, To point out some Means whereby we all may be thus built up, an *Habitation for God*, and an *holy Temple acceptable unto him*.

I. *First*, I am to mark out the several Steps and Stages of the Christian's Progress, as he grows in Grace, and advances in the Duties of his holy Calling. Now

The three great Conditions required on our Part, by the Gospel of *Christ*, are those known Duties of Faith, Repentance, and Obedience. Let us then observe the Progresses which may be made in each of these.

I. *First* in Faith; whereof there are various Degrees; according to the various Means there are of Conviction, and the different Uses which are made of them. There is a Faith which is due to natural Religion; and this, if duly pursued, will lead us to the Christian.

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Ch. xi. 6. *He that cometh to God (says the Author to the Hebrews) must believe that he is; and when once he believes the Existence of a Being adorn'd with infinite Perfection, he will the more easily be persuaded to believe yet further, that he is a Rewarder of such as diligently seek him.* When his Goodness is consider'd, it will not be hard to conceive he should reveal his Will to reasonable Creatures desirous of following it. His Holiness makes it credible, that he would provide a Reparation to injur'd Majesty, and consult the Discipline of Law and Government. And when all this comes expressly ascertain'd in a written Word, and attested with the Credentials of a miraculous Power; his Truth gives then yet further Evidence, and positively vouches for the whole Transaction. In every Link of this Chain, there is a Weakness or a Strength, proportionable to the Industry which has been applied to fasten it, and to fix upon the Mind an indubitable Conviction. There is a Distrust and Scrupulosity on the one Hand, as there is on the other, a Joy
and

and Peace in believing. There is a faint and dubious Expectation, as well as a Plerophory and full Assurance of Hope. The Time is wisely then, and well employ'd, which advances us by rational and proper Steps from the one of these to the other; which leads us from Darkness to Light, from dim and obscure Notices, into more explicit and clear Discoveries; which wears out our Perplexities, and silences our Doubts, and overspreads us with the Pleasure and the Calm of a full undistracted Persuasion. This is the proper Progress of our Faith; and it should be our Endeavour to carry it on by these Degrees to its due Perfection.

2. *Secondly,* As Repentance is another Condition of the Covenant made between God and Man in *Christ Jesus*; so there are various Degrees of Performance in it. The most abandon'd Sinner is not perhaps without some lucid Intervals, wherein he wishes his Lusts less prevalent, and his Will more conformable to the Dictates of his Understanding. Would he now have duly

improv'd this favourable Disposition; those Wishes would have grown more ardent, till they had extorted from him a Resolution of better Practice. And that Resolution would have ripen'd with Time into an effectual Purpose; which might have had its Fruit unto Holiness, and have guarded sufficiently against all future Lapses. There is a transient and a godly Sorrow for Sin; the one is common to most Offenders; the other *worketh Repentance unto Salvation*. When it ends as it began, in the Formalities of a fruitless Grief, the Storm is soon over, and leaves the Mind but little affected with the preceding Passion.

But it has often a further and a better Influence; and leads the Mind from some fainter Degrees of Remorse, into all the Agonies of a more efficacious Compunction, till it settles in an utter Abhorrence of Sin, and a Delight in all the Opportunities of approving its own entire Conversion. A true Penitent wrought up into a just Sense of his mighty Obligations to God, will stop at no Difficulties, nor complain of any Hardships.

ships. He will be glad to cancel what he can of that vast Arrear wherein he is Debtor to the divine Justice; and therefore will be ever pushing forwards with the utmost Industry, to demonstrate his Sincerity, and to procure Acceptance and Pardon.

Now this is a Disposition which in the

3. *Third Place*, cannot but produce the most uniform and cordial Obedience.

Such indeed is the Nature of our present State, that we shall always have in it Blemishes enough to humble us, and to make Way upon Reflection for further Improvements. But then, tho' Infirmities will always attend us in this frail Condition of Mortality, we may and we ought to be always paring from them, and diminishing both their Number and Quality. We can never here love God as we ought, neither with that Disinterestedness of Affection, nor that Ardour of Devotion, which are doubtless due to his glorious Perfections: But we may be constantly supplying the

Defects of the Passion, and ministring daily Fuel to this noble Flame. We cannot here entirely divest our Charity to our Neighbour from all Allays of Selfishness, nor work it up to that Pitch of universal Friendship which the common Alliance of our Nature may in Strictness demand of all who belong to it: But we may, and we ought to make it more and more diffusive, to heighten the social Propensity, and familiarize our Minds to the Offices of Benevolence and Humanity.

Finally, tho' we cannot in all Points restrain our Passions from exceeding their appointed Boundaries; tho' Anger will sometimes enflame, and Appetite transport us; yet we may, and we ought to gain Ground of our inordinate Affections, to lessen their Influence, and to enlarge the Powers of our Reason and Virtue. If we *press forwards to Perfection*, and *strive in earnest for the Mastery*, we shall grow by Degrees to be *temperate in all Things*, and to command our interior Faculties with a full Authority. There is no Passion so craving, but Resolution

Resolution may stop it in this or that Example. Imminent, foreseen Danger will always do it. This Danger may be so represented, as to stop it in any assignable Instance: And what it does to Day, it may do to Morrow; and will do it the more easily to Morrow for having done it to Day. A few Acts will go some Way towards the Habit; each will facilitate the next; and when the great Rise of the Hill is once conquer'd, it will be easy to keep our Ground, and to gain yet more: For the Ascent is steepest at first, and every Step will be taken with less of Labour and Reluctance.

There is indeed, and must ever be a continual Progress: But, I say, after the first Asperities are conquer'd, the Way grows smoother, and the Passage more practicable; till at Length there be an End of all Unwillingness and Contest; and the *Testimonies of God become as well our Delight, as our Counsellors.*

Such are the Beginnings, such the Improvement and Perfection of the Christian Life; these are the several

Steps and Stages by which it advances in the Duties of its holy Calling.

I am next, under my

II. *Second* General, to represent the Necessity and Advantage of this Growth and Improvement. Now this I shall do from the following Considerations.

1. *First*, That our Sincerity in Religion can no otherwise be well approv'd, than by our Growth and Improvement in it. Nor

2. *Secondly*, Our Perseverance be ensured whilst we are at a Stand, without further Progress.

3. *Thirdly*, As Grace is the Seed of Glory, that Seed must rise by gradual Advances to its full and proper Maturity.

1. *First*, I say, our Sincerity in Religion can no otherwise be well approv'd, than by our Growth and Improvement in it.

It is hardly indeed conceivable, that a Man should practise with good Meaning the Duties of his holy Calling, without acquiring such a Promptitude
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and Facility in that Practice, as may render it inviting and easy to him. Somewhat I know may be here objected from the Reluctances of Nature, and the Gainsayings of Flesh and Blood. But Difficulties as great as any which can be hence pretended we see daily master'd, by Men who set themselves in earnest to contend with them. We see Dispositions and Habits form'd in Favour of Customs and of Practices, which could never have been learnt without much Industry and Labour: But yet when learnt, they go smoothly forward, not only without Fatigue, but with a good deal of Ease and Pleasure to the Doer. Now let human Nature be represented as averse as you please from the Discipline of Religion (as surely there is much of Aversion and Reluctance against it in our present Frame) yet a Man sincerely desirous to break thro' these Impediments, and careful to approve his Conscience void of Offence, will keep bent so long, till the Bent grows natural; will repeat and multiply the Acts of Virtue, till they become familiar,

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miliar, and till his Mind contracts a Disposition towards them. I say his Sincerity in Religion supposes a Restraint upon him, which shall keep him free from every Instance of wilful Transgression, as well as a Sense of Duty, which shall lead him to embrace all Opportunities of Good. Allow this Restraint and this Sense of Duty to sit upon him at first uneasily; yet if those Apprehensions continue, they will become more familiar with Time, till his Constitution be at last reconciled to them, embraces them as chosen Sentiments, and allows him to act with a full Consent in Pursuance of them. This, in Course, will be the Progress of the Mind when it moves sincerely in the Business of Religion. In this, as in other Cases, a constant Train of *Acts* will introduce *Dispositions* and *Habits*: And when a Man has once contracted these, he will be prompted to go on yet further; each Step in his Progress will increase that Promptitude; and thus even the Byass of Nature will gradually draw towards the Side of Grace. Thus you see how
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inseparably a Growth in Grace is annex'd to Sincerity in the Performance of our Duty. For observe the Process and Connexion: Sincerity in Religion implies a Constancy in acting religiously; and a Constancy in acting religiously, will introduce by Degrees a Facility and Habit of so acting. Now Habit will ever be attended with a Delight in the Performance, and that Delight will produce a Desire of repeating the delightful Practice.

Again,

2. *Secondly*, The Necessity of our Growth in Grace will be more apparent from this other Consideration, that our Perseverance cannot be ensured, whilst we are at a Stand without further Progress.

You may have observ'd from the foregoing Article, that Sincerity in Religion will in Time make Religion familiar and habitual to us; which cannot but produce a Growth and an Improvement in it.

For tho' we are always to expect in this World our Trials and our Conflicts,

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and are therefore not to give over our Care and Watchfulness, yet it is impossible that those Trials and Conflicts should press at all Times equally, or that we should stand always exposed to the Heat of the Engagement. In the Course and Conduct of our spiritual Warfare, we shall doubtless either *gain* Ground or *lose* it. So many Objects as this World abounds with to relax our Care, and to weaken our Resistance; our Courage and Constancy would be sure to flag, if they were not supported by observable Advantages gain'd in the Conflict. Our Zeal for the Service, and our Sincerity in discharging it, would grow cold and dubious, if they were not reliev'd with some Respite from the continual Contest, and some Enlargement in their Prospects of a complete and perfect Victory. It is not indeed in our Nature to bear perpetual Opposition, or to act always upon the Force against its darling Inclinations. Those Inclinations must themselves be rectified, and gained over to the Cause of Virtue, if we expect a prosperous

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perous Issue, or that we should persevere in the Exercise and Practice of it. The Law of Sincerity will oblige us to do some Things against the Grain and Current of our own Propensities. But tho' in some few Examples, it may stand for a While against that Current, it is not to be hoped that it should always do so, except the Current can be diverted into another Channel ; and so the Force of its Resistance be thereby weakened. But now there will be, in the Comparison, small Danger of our Perseverance, if, as Temptation is observed to lessen, the Powers of Religion be found to increase and multiply : Since the Man who has already got over the greatest Difficulties of his Duty, and has now the Force of Habits to assist him in his Progress, has a fair and smooth Path before him, and is in little Likelihood of stumbling or falling. It may still indeed behoove him to *take Heed of his Ways, after having turn'd his Feet unto God's Testimonies* ; because how smooth soever his Way may appear before him, there will always be some *Ascent*, tho' that Ascent be

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be never so gentle; and there may lurk, unobserved, some untoward Impediments which may shock him in his Progress, at least may retard his Advances; and perhaps when he has well nigh gain'd the Top of the Hill, may cast him headlong from it. Yet surely with common Care, and very little Labour, he may pursue his delightful Journey, thro' the Road he is so well acquainted with; and not fail of reaching the End of it in Peace and Safety.

Thus again, you see the Necessity of a Growth in Grace, to our Perseverance in it; that, if we do not go forwards, we shall certainly go backwards; as likewise, that our Perseverance in Religion is much assisted and secured by our Improvements in it. But,

3. *Thirdly*, As Grace is the Seed of Glory, that Seed (I observ'd) must rise by gradual Advances to its full and proper Maturity.

Heaven is rather to be considered as a State of Perfection, than as a Place of Entertainment. When we consider it under the latter Notion, we are too apt to
disparage

disparage it, by mean and improper Representations. But when we view it under the former Character, and apprehend this World as a School of Discipline, and as a State of Preparation for another, the most just as well as most natural Inference will be, that we endeavour to brighten those Virtues which are there to shine out in their fullest Lustre: If (for example) our Faith is there to be perfected by Vision; that we make at present the *Evidence of Things not seen*, as sure and firm as it is practicable and possible to render it: If our Hope is there to be finish'd by Enjoyment; that we entertain ourselves here as much as we can, with the Earnests of our Inheritance, and with the Foretastes of our future Bliss. If our Love to God and one another is there to be purg'd from every Allay of Design and Selfishness; that here it proceed upon Motives of the purest Kind, and advance by just Degrees to the most extensive and affectionate Benevolence. For this is only to learn our Lesson beforehand, that we may not be Strangers to our Duty, when we shall
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be brought to practise it before the best of Company. Such indeed, and so intimate is the Alliance, between the Virtues of this Life, and our Employments in a better, that *without Holiness no Man can see the Lord*. And were he admitted to see him, he could take no Delight in a Presence, so much too pure for his Filth, and so much too bright for his sullied Manners. But now he, who by a due Improvement in the Methods of Grace is called to his future State, with that previous Fitness which he will receive from such his Improvement, will go into Heaven ripe for the Felicities and Glories of it. There is a Scale in Virtue; the lowest Round of it is fasten'd to this World, and the highest reaches to the other. Like that Visionary Ladder, which was seen by *Jacob* in his Dream; it opens a Communication between Men and Angels, and between Heaven and Earth. When the unavoidable Incumbrances of Flesh and Blood are removed, and the Soul of such a Man is cloathed with a proper Garment; it has little more to do than to continue its accustomed Exercises

cises, only adorned, as they will then be, with fresh Embellishments, and enlarged and beautified with new Improvements. The Change will be rather in Degree, than Substance; the same Virtues, only exalted; the same Dispositions, Manners and Habits, only purified, brightened up, and perfected.

Thus you see what a natural and necessary Connexion there is between our Growth in Grace, and our Advances to future Glory. And from these several Views which have here been taken, it is easy to observe the Necessity and Advantage of such our Growth, and such our Improvement.

I come therefore now under my

III. *Third General*, To point out some of the Means, whereby we all may be thus built up, an *Habitation for God*; and an *holy Temple acceptable unto him*.

I. *First*, then, Since (as we have observed) those Habits of Virtue which are essential to our Improvement in it, are contracted by a frequent Repetition of single Acts; let us by all Means cherish

cherish the Opportunities of exerting those Acts, that thereby we may contract a Promptitude towards the Habit. A firm Resolution will go far in this Way, and will bend down our native Propensities to a Compliance with it. And then the Bent which was begun by mere Dint of Resolution, will be brought in Time to continue, without further Violence. *Custom* will supply the Defects of *Nature*; and the Habits once gain'd, will make the Practice easy and pleasurable.

Method and Management may carry us to Attainments, which, upon a general and distant View of them, seem almost impracticable. Some voluntary Abridgements in Instances *not* commanded may have their Use, and may facilitate our Obedience in such as *are*. The Wisdom of our Church, in Conformity to the Wisdom of ancient Practice, hath recommended these to us in the present Season; that what may profitably be done at *any* Time, we would do at *this* Time more especially. Nor is the Distinction of Seasons for the more solemn

Exercise

Exercise of our Virtues, without its Tendency to very advantageous Purposes: And it is a Contempt of Order and Authority to let them pass over us unheeded and unobserved. The Out-works of Religion have ever as yet been esteemed *good* Guards and Fences to it: And we should not weaken its Barriers, if we really value its Security. For tho' the Form of Godliness without its Power, is frivolous and worthless, yet any Pretence to the Power without the Form, has an assuming Air with it, and speaks the presumptuous Language of a bloated and vain Enthusiast.

2. Therefore let us be frequent and impartial in the Work of Self-Reflexion; of looking into our own Minds; of observing our Advances, or remarking upon our own Backslidings. Weeds are most apt to grow up in a Soil that's neglected; whilst Men sleep, the Enemy is most apt to take Advantage, and to sow his Tares. Many unseemly Passions take Root, whilst we attend not to their Rise, and are regardless of their Growth; and it is much more easy to nip them in their earliest Buddings,

Buddings, than it is to dislodge them, when they have a deeper Interest in Flesh and Blood.

The general Respect to Religion reaches no further, than mere outward Decency, (it were well if it always reach'd so far;) but among the most of those who profess it, it seldom reaches much farther: And hence it is that we see so little of the Fruits of Holiness; that the Manners of Men are so little regulated by it, when they can hope to escape a public Observation. But did they consider it as it deserves to be thought of, it would weed out of their Hearts every Root of Bitterness, every rank and disorderly Affection.

There is in this Matter an unaccountable Neglect among such, as would not only *seem*, but really would *be* religious. They suffer notorious Breaches upon their Virtue, great Allays of Infirmary and Passion, to surprise and to possess them, without observing, that these are discouraging Circumstances, which set them far backward, and lose a great deal of their Way towards Heaven.

Whereas a careful Inspection would prevent the Growth and Spreading of their Distemper, would expedite their Cure, and enlarge thenceforwards the Powers of their Virtue.

3. Therefore we should work up our Minds to a full Persuasion, that Religion is the most important and concerning Business of our Lives. Were this entertain'd as a governing Principle in our Conduct, we should never be Strangers to the State of our own Souls. Our Accounts would be always in better Order, and the Ballance of Loss and Profit more frequently adjusted. An industrious Manager of worldly Interest is seldom observed to think he has enough, or to give over in the full Career of advantaging his Fortune: But it is easy for Men to think they have enough of Religion, because they do not perhaps despise or blaspheme it, have no scandalous Enormities to account for, and are much the same Men that they were, neither better nor worse than some Time ago. All this While they are content, without

moving a Step towards Heaven, or curing any one Infirmity, which may retard their Advances thither. Now it is much, if Vice should not gain an Interest where Virtue has so little; but however, if Growth in Grace be a necessary Duty, and the Improvement of a single Talent expected from the Trust reposed in them, they have Reason to fear the Character of unprofitable Servants, and to be cast with him in the Gospel, into outer Darkness, where shall be *Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth.*

4. *Lastly*, Let us be diligent in our Attendance upon all holy Offices, which may cultivate a Sense of our Dependence upon the Supreme Being, and cast our Minds into a Frame of Piety and Religion. The more we consider ourselves under the Guidance and Government of infinite Wisdom, the more intent we shall probably be upon our Conduct, and the more careful to approve our Hearts before him, who searches them out and knows them. Every Act of Worship we pay to God, implies on his Part, Sovereignty, Power, and

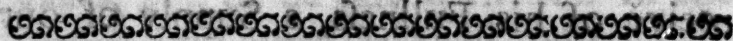
and Providence; as on ours, Indigence, Subjection, and Dependence. Nothing therefore has a more efficacious Tendency to reform our Miscarriages, or to improve our Virtues, than a frequent Application to God in the proper Inter-courses of religious Worship. Especially if we implore (as we ought) in them those Succours of the Spirit, which are promised without Reserve to every sincere Petitioner. For then shall we receive of his Fullness, a Supply of our Defects, a Reparation of our Breaches, and an Addition of Grace to Grace, 'till the Dawn of that auspicious Day, which shall cure us of all our Defects, and wipe out the Memory of all our Breaches; and perfect the Graces of his blessed Gospel, in the Glories of his everlasting Kingdom.

To which God of his infinite Mercy vouchsafe in his own due Time to carry us, thro' the Mercies and the Merits of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

E 2 SERMON



SERMON III.



PSALM xxxvi. 4.

*He deviseth Mischief upon his Bed:
he setteth himself in a Way that
is not good; he abhorreth not
Evil.*



THE Psalmist is here describing the State and Condition of those habitual and hardened Sinners, whose Delight is ever in Mischief, who make daily Advances in Guilt, and have every *Imagination of the Thoughts of their Heart only evil continually.*

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They have (he says) *no Fear of God before their Eyes, they flatter themselves in their own Sight, until their Iniquity be found to be hateful; that is, they lose their native Sense and Relish of Things, and hence are led to call Evil Good, and Good Evil: They would impose upon the World as well as themselves; would palliate to themselves and others the enormity of their Practices by fair Appearances and by plausible Excuses, till their Wickedness appears undilguis'd in its own Colours and Features, and is found to be hateful beyond all Question and all Apology. The Words of their Mouths* (he goes on to observe) *are as bad as the Works of their Hands, all Iniquity and Deceit; by Degrees they leave off entirely to be wise, and to do good.*

Then, when Things are come to this pass with them; when their Tongues and their Practices are both consenting to Guilt; when they can engage in it without Reserve, and even with Boasting; when all their Powers are devoted to the Service of Sin, without any Remains of Reverence for Religion, they run on then

in a Course of continued Mischief, without Interval or Interruption: When they can neither speak nor act it, in the Retirements of the Closer and in the Silence of the Night, they will yet contrive and hatch it; and form, in the Leisure of Darkness, those Schemes of Wickedness, wherewith they will busy themselves afterwards in the open Light.

Of one such as these the Psalmist speaks in the Text, that *he deviseth Mischief upon his Bed; he setteth himself in a Way that is not good; he abhorreth not Evil.*

Which Words have

I. Described to us the Character of an habitual Sinner; he is one who *deviseth Mischief upon his Bed.*

II. In the next Place, they give some Account, and shew some Cause why he does so; *he hath set himself* (says our Translation of the Psalter) *in no good Way; or he setteth himself* (as our Bible has it) *in a Way that is not good; i. e. he*
has

has provided himself with no fit Entertainment for his leisure Hours.

III. In the last Place, as a further *Aggravation*, and indeed a further *Reason* of his Sin; they tell us, that *he abhorreth not Evil*. His Affections are all wrong turn'd; and being so, 'tis no great Wonder that they should run Riot upon Wickedness, and induce him to commit all *Uncleanness with Greediness*.

I. I begin with the Character here given of an habitual Sinner; that he is one *who deviseth Mischief upon his Bed*, his Hours of Leisure and Reces are employ'd upon it. Now

The Guilt and Danger of his so employing them, and of so behaving, are much enflamed, by these two Considerations, which I shall presently represent to you.

1. *First*, That the Time of Retirement is the fittest and most likely Season for religious Influences to take Place, and to have a due Effect.

2. *Secondly*, That when this Time is misapplied to Contrivances for Sin, it mightily

tily improves those ill Dispositions which it finds in the Mind, and overspreads it more and more with the contagious Tincture of Vice and Wickedness.

1. *First* then, I say, that the Time of Retirement is the fittest and most likely Season for religious Influences to take Place, and to have a due Effect.

When we have retreated from the Bustle and the Business of Life, when its Pleasures are withdrawn out of Sight, and when all its Temptations are cover'd with a Veil of Darknes; then, if ever, we may expect to *commune with our own Hearts*, to consider the State and Condition of our Souls, to stand in awe of him who is invisible; with *whom the Darknes itself is indeed no Darknes, but the Night is as clear as the Day*, and to whom *Darknes and Light are both alike*.

Psal. cxix.
55.

I have thought upon thy Name, O Lord, in the Night Season (says the holy Psalmist) and the Consequence was, that *I kept thy Law*. Sin is most apt to gain us by Surprize, when we have no Time to deliberate, nor to see quite round it; in the

the various Engagements of an active Life, in the Crowd of Society, and the Amusements of Recreation, the Mind of Man is apt to be off its Guard, to neglect a distant Consequence, and to be short in that Foresight and Caution wherewith at more Leisure it might probably arm it self of Retirement and Solitude have always therefore been thought fit Instruments of Religion, great Preservatives to it in the Time of Temptation, and great Helps to elevate the Soul above sordid and vulgar Prospects.

Accordingly our Saviour recommended them by his own Example, when he was just entering upon the Discharge of his Commission, which he solemniz'd by a Recess of forty Days into the Wilderness. And the Fear of engaging too deeply in the Entanglements of the World, was the Motive to some of his Followers, for chusing a perpetual Exile from all Intercourses with it. Indeed this Zeal of theirs was over-acted, and the Pattern of their Master might be too blindly follow'd. He retired from the
World

World in order to return to it; and spent some Time in Solitude, that he might come from it the more prepared for the Work he had to do. Whereas they retired from it with no such Purpose, but instead thereof with a Resolution to have no more to do with it, and consequently to forsake all Opportunities of social Virtue. Their Example, tho' not recommended in all its Parts to our Imitation, yet hints however to us, that the Interludes of Business, and the Seasons of Retirement, when duly interspers'd amongst the more active Occasions of Life, are very fit in themselves, to enliven the Spirit of Devotion, to put us upon calling our Ways to Remembrance, and upon maintaining an Intercourse with God in all holy Aspirations. If ever we abstract our Minds from the Objects of Sense, it should be then (one would think) when the Objects of Sense seem willing to withdraw, and to leave us at Liberty and Leisure for more spiritual Entertainments. If ever we escape from the Influence of this World's Pollutions, it should be then

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S E R M O N III.

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(one would expect) when they have left us to our selves, and have ceas'd to haunt us with their importunate Sollicitations. If ever our Reason re-asserts its Authority, it should be then, (one would imagine) when there is nothing from without to interrupt its Pretensions, or to oppose its Claim. If ever Religion can raise up our Souls to God, it should be then (one would believe) when our Souls are free from all external Impediments; and when *Nature*, which at other Times fights against *Grace*, is rather at this Time inclinable to assist it.

Wherefore, if this favourable Juncture be lost, and instead of improving it to the Purposes of Religion it be perverted to the Increase of Wickedness and Guilt; if we *commune with our own Hearts* to no other nor better Effect, than that of hardening them in the Ways of Sin, and contrive in the *Night* for the Mischief to be acted in the Day succeeding; here is an Instrument of Virtue manifestly abused to be an Instrument of Vice; here is the Loss of an Opportunity either to *Holiness* or *Repentance*;

tance; and such Proof besides is given of an incurable Bent towards all Licentiousness, as leaves behind it very little Hope of Reformation or of Change. For when the Constitution of the Soul grows so rank and so distemper'd, that it turns *Helps* into *Hindrances*, and *whole-some Food* into *Poyson*; they must indeed be potent Remedies, such as are hard to be found, and scarce ever met with, which can administer Relief, in such an hopeless Case.

Especially since it was observ'd in the
2. *Second Place*, that when this Time of Solitude and Leisure, (so fit in it self to raise and cultivate a Disposition towards God and Goodness) is misapplied to Contrivances for Vice and Wickedness; it must needs improve those ill Dispositions which it finds in the Mind, and overspread it more and more with the Contagion of Sin.

It is hardly possible to be otherwise. Where the general Bent of the Soul inclines, there must and will ensue a Conformity of Practice and of Action to it. This Practice, when become habitual
by

by much and repeated Usage, will tincture the Mind with a general Disposition towards it. That *Disposition*, when fix'd and rooted, will in its turn assist and forward the *Action* it inclines to: So that by drawing upon his Fancy the Scenes and Contrivances of Wickedness, the Sinner prepares himself to commit it with the more and the greater Readiness; that *Readiness* once contracted, gains upon the *Inclination*, and thus in its turn is both Effect and Cause, of his *devising it upon his Bed*, and of his acting it upon the Stage of Life and Conversation.

If he were not much in Love with it, and greatly addicted to it, Religion would find a Time to interpose its Influences; and none so likely, none so fit to receive them, as the Season of Solitude and Retirement. But when this is gain'd over to other Purposes, is employed in assisting the Pretensions of Sin, and in contriving and catering for its various Prospects; this fixes the Affections entirely upon it, rivets them close to it, and makes a Separation almost impracticable. When the Hours
of

of *Business* are employ'd in *practising*, and those of *Leisure* in *contriving* for it, the whole Man is engaged, and engaged (one would fear) too deeply to be ever divorced from it. It is a favourable Symptom, and speaks a Man well inclined towards Religion, when his Thoughts are much and often employ'd upon it; when he delights to meditate upon the Precepts, and to make the *Testimonies* of God his *Counsellors*: It is, I say, a Sign that he is already well disposed, and gives Cause of Hope, that he will be daily better. For thus, in all Likelihood, he will grow to practise the Duties of his holy Calling with more Chearfulness and Vigour; and the more he is exercis'd in the Acts of Virtue, and in Meditations about it, the more Delight he will take in such Exercises; the more familiar they will be to him, and thence the more pleasing.

It is in like Manner as untoward a Symptom of a Man's Progress in Sin, when the main Bent of his Purposes has always an Aspect towards it, when it opens a Passage to his Mind, upon every

ry Occasion of Recess and Leisure; it looks, I say, as if his Thoughts did never willingly *absent* from it, when they return to it as often as Occasions give Leave. This has of it self an unpromising View, and seems to speak him given up already to a reprobate Mind. But it hath moreover a further Tendency to engage him yet more deeply, to ripen the Habits of Sin more perfectly, and to fasten upon his Mind those Likings and Dispositions to it, which are ever so apt to arise from Custom, and from repeated Usage. What is much in a Man's *Thoughts* will often flow into his *Practice*; and what he chuses at an Hour of *Leisure* will claim his Acquaintance in a more *active* Season.

If therefore he *deviseth Mischief upon his Bed*, if his Hours of Retirement are spent in hatching and in forming it; this will both prove him already much disposed to it, and will heighten moreover that untoward Propensity. Now from these Considerations his Guilt and Danger are sorely aggravated.

The Text proceeds in the

II. Se-

II. *Second Place*, To give some Account, and to shew some Cause of his thus proceeding; of the Abuse he puts upon his Hours of Leisure. *He setteth himself in a Way that is not good* (says our Bible) or (as the Version of our Psalter renders it) *He hath set himself in no good Way; i. e.* He hath provided himself with no fit Entertainment for the Seasons of Solitude and Retirement. Hence, when they find him thus unguarded, Sin the more easily makes its Approaches, and finds the readier Reception from him. Here

It shall therefore be my Business, to represent to you the Mischiefs of this fatal Neglect, with what Guilt, and what Consequence it is always attended.

The *first* Article I shall draw up against it, is the Abuse of a Trust reposed in us all by a gracious Providence. The Scriptures represent our Condition in this Life, as a State of Discipline and Preparation for a better. And indeed every

every Circumstance in it seems to proclaim it such. We have a Work to do, and a Time assign'd us for it. The Work is improving our Souls, and disposing all our Faculties to a Ripeness and Capacity for eternal Bliss. The Time for it is, that Continuance in Life which the Providence of God allows us; *for when the Night cometh no Man can work.* But as every Act of Life cannot be supposed to be an immediate Act of Religion (there being so many necessary Avocations from it) therefore we should be always in *Habit* disposed to it, tho' the *Acts* be frequently and necessarily interrupted. Then the Seasons of Solitude and Leisure, instead of being employ'd upon Contrivances for Sin, would naturally fall upon the Offices of Religion, and upon furthering those Improvements which are expected from us, in all good and laudable Qualifications. *I was glad* (says the holy Psalmist) *when* Psal. cxxii. *they said unto me, let us go into the House* ^{1, 2.} *of the Lord.* Being of himself well-inclined he readily embrac'd the Motion from others; and closed with the first Opportunity

portunity which was offer'd of presenting himself before his Maker. Had not his Mind been previously form'd and favourably dispos'd towards God and Goodness; had it not been season'd beforehand with a Tincture of Virtue, and habitually bent towards Acts of Devotion, he would have sought in all Likelihood for other Amusements, and might have easily found them in the Abundance and Splendor of a Royal Fortune. What shall we do, or how shall we spend the Morrow? was to him no Question.

Those who have the most of Time upon their Hands, would never complain that they have too much of it, did they consider its Value and its just Importance. Were it only this single Regard, that we must in *Time* provide for *Eternity*, this alone should rouse our most active Diligence, that we may be found furnish'd with all proper and necessary Means for so great a Purpose. But when it is further consider'd, that this Time is to us uncertain, that this *Night*, for ought we know, *our Souls may be required from us*, and that therefore

fore Eternity may depend, as to us, upon the Use we make of the few present Moments; this is still a further Incentive for applying them *all* to the most important Purposes, without the Loss of *one*; since that *one* may prove our only Opportunity. But now except we be habitually principled in this Persuasion, and disposed beforehand to a careful Provision for this one Thing needful, the Occasions of it will find us unprepared to embrace them; and so will pass over us without any Improvement. The Hours of Business, or of Preparation for it; even those of just or necessary Recreation, when employ'd with Innocence, will account for themselves without further Apology. Those of *perfect Leisure and Retirement*, are the dangerous Articles which it will be hardest to adjust; if the Mind has no standing Byass which should incline it to Good, when free from external Hindrances. If the Soul has no Relish for Religion, no Aptness for discerning the Beauties of Holiness; Leisure will rather be found to disincline, than to dispose it towards

F 2 them.

them. But how great will then be the Guilt which is thus contracted? When the Time allotted us to do the Work of him who sent us into this World for his *Glory*, is employ'd to his *Dis honour*, and in Disobedience to his Laws! When the Seasons assign'd us for working out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling, are either thro' mere *Idleness* neglected, or thro' downright *Vice* perverted! If the Servant, who hid his Talent in a Napkin, was adjudg'd to the Tormentors, for his gross Neglect; of how much sorer Punishment shall he be thought worthy, who not content to hide, exposes and abuses and profusely squanders it upon the Pursuits of Sin? 'Tis somewhat to *forget*, but more to *betray* a Trust; 'tis bad to *stand still*, and not to improve, but 'tis worse to go *backwards*, and to heighten continually the Account of Guilt.

2. *Secondly*, Therefore it will here deserve to be considered, that he who makes no Advances *forwards* will certainly go *backwards*; that he, who has not laid in a fit Provision for a *good Use* of his
Time

Time, will certainly put it to a *bad* one. The Soul of Man is of an active and sprightly Make, and will not bear to lie long idle. If it be not furnish'd with innocent or useful Employments, it will engage in such as are vicious and hurtful. If it be not set in a *good* Way, it will set itself in an *ill* one. The former will require from us some Endeavours and some Care to manage successfully; but the latter will shift for itself, and will shift with the more fatal Efficacy, for having been neglected. The mere Rankness of the Soil will bring up Weeds and useless Productions; but a Plant of Value must be cultivated with due Application, and industriously fenced against the Blasts of an injurious Season. It is really Disgrace to human Nature, that two such noble Faculties as our Wills and Understandings, should be suffered to lie undisciplined and unimprov'd, while so many meaner Occasions intrude upon us, and steal from us those precious Hours which might be employ'd to so great Advantage. But the Mischief of the Neglect is not here the

only, nor the greatest, tho' it be in it self a very scandalous and shameful Grievance. For the *Omission* of *Good* will open a Way to the *Commission* of *Evil*. The Ground we might gain in *Virtue*, will be gain'd to *Vice*; and *Sin* will enter where it finds the Passage not guarded by a vigilant and lively Sense of *Duty*. To the *one* we are always liable from the Influence of our native Corruptions; whereas the *other* is acquired by a Course of Discipline and Labour, and of many a resolute Stand against our own Desires. Wherefore if this Care be relax'd, and this Discipline unbent, there will be nothing left to oppose against even the weakest Impressions of a tempting Object. A Man's own Passions will easily suggest to him how he should use his Hours of *Leisure*, if he knows not beforehand how *otherwise* to use them. If we are not prepared to fill up the blank Spaces in Life, as often as they occur to us; Sin, we know, is a ready Counsellor, and will presently suggest to us the Means of filling them.

There

There is no Circumstance in Life or Fortune which can excuse, or Need expose us to an Abuse of this great Depositum. High and Low, Rich and Poor, one with another must all account for it. 'Tis to Many a Degree of Misfortune not to have been *bred* to some Employment; but 'tis a greater not to know how to find one. So many Occasions of improving ourselves; so many Opportunities as there are of doing Good to others; so many Avocations by necessary Business, and so many innocent Arts of Amusement, will leave very little Excuse to the most *ignorant* for their Want of *Knowledge*, or to the more *knowing* for their Want of further *Improvement*; to the Men of *Leisure*, for their Want of a fit *Employment*; or to the Men of *Business* for misapplying their Hours of *Retirement*.

All might, all *ought* to find, in the Improvement of themselves, and in Service to God or Man, a sufficient Occupation of their vacant Seasons, to silence the Complaint of too much *Leisure*;

and to guard against the Consequence of being led by it into Sin. There is yet,

III. A *Third* Point remaining to be spoke to from the Text; which is the further Aggravation, and indeed the further Reason of that Man's Sin, who misbehaves in the Case before us; And it consists in this, that *he abhorreth not Evil*. His Affections are all wrong turn'd, and being so, 'tis no great Wonder that they should run riot upon Wickedness, and induce him to *commit all Uncleannefs with Greedinefs*.

I. That he *abhorreth not Evil*, is, I say, an Aggravation of his Sin; for it implies, that his Reason is subdued to it, and Grace extinguish'd. The Version of our *Psalter* renders it, *He abhorreth not any thing that is Evil*; which seems to intimate a Resolution to stick at no Enormity, but to wade through all the conceivable Degrees of Wickedness, which have any Tendency to promote his Ends, and to advance his Purposes. Now a Man who has brought his Conscience to this Pass, must have fear'd it
throughly,

thoroughly, before it would bend to be thus compliant. Corrupt as our Nature is, there is still some Modesty left in it, and some Reluctance against the grosser Instances of Guilt. The Complexion of a Man will rise at the Thought of them, and will powerfully restrain him from all Approaches towards them. The Aids of the Spirit of God will interpose with their preventive Influences, and will give Weight and Strength to the Remonstrances of his own Mind. There must have been a deep Progress in Guilt, before these Obstacles will be easily surmounted; great Violence offered to his own Reason, and much Despite to the Spirit of Grace. Now the Proportion of Guilt turns very much upon the Proportion of Helps and Hindrances, with which a Man is either assisted or incumbered in the Discharge of his Duty. Where he has powerful Convictions to restrain him from offending; these are justly charged to his Account, as Helps to keep him firm in the Paths of Righteousness. He must take Pains to silence them, or resolutely stop his Ears against them.

For a good While the *Innocence* of a Man is guarded by his *Complexion*; when some Breaches have been made upon it, yet to sin with an high Hand, in infamous and base Examples, is an Attainment which requires some Time to ripen it, and some Struggle with his own Mind, before he can consent to it. This Time and this Struggle are providential Helps, which, if he would use them rightly, would enable him to escape, and bring him out of the Snare with Innocence and Honour. But when instead of applying them to this happy Purpose, he furiously breaks thro' all Impediments, and rushes upon Sin in Sight of its fatal Consequences; he evidences plainly, that he's Proof against Grace and Reason, and irretrievably bent upon his own Destruction. In the next Instance therefore he will sin with less Reluctance, and will be more easily induced to go greater Lengths in it. His Abhorrence of Evil will slacken by the same Steps and Degrees, wherewith he has been accustomed to elude or defeat the Suggestions of his Conscience.

Every

Every Step he takes, and every Conquest he gains over his own Reason, increases his Arrear of Guilt, as it lessens his Sense and Apprehension of it. It is a common Progress, to defend upon *Principle*, what had its Rise from *Frailty*; to proceed from *Infirmity* to *wilful Guilt*; and from sinning *against* Conviction, to sin *away all* Conviction.

Now this, I say, as it is a very great Aggravation of the Offences thus committed, so is,

2. *Secondly*, a further Reason, *why* they are committed. Abhorrence of Evil, is the best and surest Guard against it. If a Man loves and likes it, he will, at one Time or other, be gain'd upon to embrace it. For a State of Neutrality between Vice and Virtue is impracticable, and impossible to human Nature; which is too much a Borderer upon *both*, not to take Part with *one*, or with the *other*. If Grace and Reason cannot obtain of us to *deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts*; those *Lusts* will prevail with us to comply with their Demands, to *quench the Spirit*, and to *deny our Reason*. He therefore

fore who cannot work up his Mind to a practical and full Persuasion, that Vice and Wickedness deserve his Hatred and Aversion; and who cannot thence engage his Affections *against* Sin; will find himself inclined to *like* it when it comes recommended to him, with its customary Charms. When once the Quarrel is so far made up between his *Reason* and his *Vices*, that he finds no great Reluctance of the *one against* the *other*; the Reconciliation will soon be perfected; and then there will be an End of all further Struggle. Sin hath always a Friend in our Bosom to plead its Cause, and to recommend its Pretensions. When once we grow languid and indifferent in the Business of Religion; when it ceases to be esteemed of as a Thing of the utmost Importance; and when our Passions are grown cold in the Pursuit of it, and we can observe its Interest declining in our Hearts, without Solitude and Emotion, and an Hatred of the Causes which appear to lessen it; Vice, 'tis then manifest, is getting the Ascendant;

ant; and will daily proceed in fastening its Hold upon us.

He therefore who *abhorreth not Evil*, will soon, 'tis to be feared, *abhor* that which is *Good*; at least he will not so far retain a Liking to his Duty, as shall carry him thro' it, when there is any thing to withstand it. Difficulties are never undertook, or however not master'd, where there is not a good Measure of Zeal, to engage a Man in the Enterprize, and to carry him through it, in Spight of all Impediments. So that 'tis a Character of worse Consequence, than it seems at first View to carry with it, to have at Heart no Abhorrence of Evil, and is join'd, you see, with that of the habitual Sinner, as what contributes to make him so, and is besides a Symptom of his being so.

We may observe then hence, that *Principle* is necessary to *Practice*; that a Love of God and of our Duty is an essential Ingredient into an acceptable Obedience; and that we shall never be
secure

secure from the Wiles of Sin, 'till we have entirely cast off all Inclinations to it. This, indeed is a Privilege, which in its fullest Perfection, is reserved to a State of confirmed and perfect Holiness; but the nearer Approaches we here shall make to what we are hereafter design'd for, the brighter will be the Glory, which shall then encircle us; the more we stretch out our present Powers to the Attainments of *Holiness*, the more enlarged will our future Capacities be, for the Reception of *Happiness*; and the more we divest ourselves of the Frailties cleaving to us in the Time which now is, the more exalted will our Recompence prove, in that blessed Day, when Mortality shall be swallowed up of Life.

Finally, Let our Seasons of Retirement be sanctified by Offices of Devotion towards God, and of good Will towards Man. Let our Prayers and our Alms go jointly up for a Memorial before the Throne of Grace.

The Distinction of Seasons for that
more

more solemn Exercife of our Virtues is wifely ordered, in a World abounding with fuch various Avocations from our Duty.

1. Our Church in pious Conformity to ancient Practice, reminds us of it in the prefent Juncture. But in vain are the wifefl Appointments made, if no Regard be paid to them. The Opportunities of Good neglected enflame our Account of Guilt, and treasure up Wrath for us in the Day of Wrath.

You can want no Motives to the Difcharge of fo confefled a Duty, as that which a very laudable Custom will prefently lay before you. The infinite Mercies of God your Saviour, the various Miferies of Man your Neighbour, the manifold Diffreffes to which you are all obnoxious amidft the feveral Uncertainties of Life and Fortune, the Numbers of thofe who in this extenfive Diftrict implore your Succour, the Destitutions of the Aged, the Cries of the Orphan, and the Tears of the Widow, are all Perfuaſions to you to confider
their

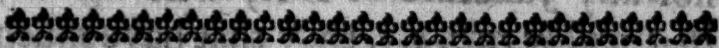
their Necessities, and to relieve their Wants. *And God is not unrighteous, that he should forget your Works or your Labour which proceedeth of Love; which Love ye have shewed for his Name's sake, who have ministred unto the Saints, and yet do minister.*



SERMON



SERMON IV.



I TIM. VI. 17.

Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not High-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches, but in the Living God, who giveth us richly all Things to enjoy.



HOWEVER peculiar this Charge might be, with respect to the Occasion upon which it was given; the Reason of it is general, and alike extensive to all the Ages of the Church. Indeed,

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When

When Religion lies under public Discouragements, the Men who have most to lose by it, are usually most exposed, and thence have most Temptation to desert it.

Thus far therefore the Charge was peculiar to the persecuted Condition of the Christian Church.

But as there is no Posture of Affairs, nor any Juncture of Life, wherein *they that will be rich, i. e.* they that have much set their Hearts on being so, and have succeeded in their Purpose, may not probably fall into some Snare or other; as a Slippery Station gives evermore a Suspicion, that the Persons planted in it may not keep their Ground, nor abide the Test of its various Temptations; it is hence incumbent upon those, who are careful for their Safety, to admonish them of their Danger, and to press upon them the *walking circumspectly*.

The Charge here given by our Apostle to *Timothy*, is virtually a Charge to every Minister of the Gospel.

There is, we see, a good deal of Emphasis in the Manner of delivering it;

to intimate its Importance, and the Necessity of conveying it to the Parties interested.

Whether they would hear it or no, did not enter into Consideration; *Timothy* was to perform his Part, and to risque the Censures which should be pass'd upon his Conduct.

Whether, therefore, a People apt to be high-minded, would bear a Caution against it, was, I say, to be no Part of the Question; since the less they would endure it, the more Reason there was to press it; as where the Danger is greatest, there is ever most Occasion to warn Men of it.

In the Charge here given by our Apostle there are,

I. Some Things implied; and

II. Others directly specified.

I. The Things implied are these Two.

1. The general Obligation which is incumbent upon the Ministers of the Gospel, to warn their People of the Sins they are most exposed to.

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2. The

2. The peculiar Snare which rich Men are aptest to fall into, of being high-minded, and of trusting in uncertain Riches.

Both these have a clear and evident Foundation in the Text. As to the

1. *First* we may observe, that *Timothy* was chief Officer in the Church of *Ephesus*; as such it was his Business to see his People well-instructed in Things pertaining to God, and in Matters concerning their everlasting Welfare, to rouse up the Slothful, to soften the Obdurate, to melt the Impenitent, to convince the Unbelieving, to persuade the Reluctant, to rebuke the Presumptuous and Disorderly, and to warn the Sinner of his Danger.

Whatsoever else may have been judg'd extraordinary in the Office of our *Ephesian* Bishop, these were apparently such common Parts of it as descended from him upon all his Successors: Who, as well as himself, were to *preach the Word, to be instant in Season and out of Season; to reprove, rebuke and exhort with all Long-Suffering and Doctrine.*

Whatever

Whatever Shape or Posture Danger may appear in, or wherever Temptations are observ'd to press hardest, thither the Pastor must point his Vigilance and Observance.

If Afflictions and Distresses bow down his Flock, he must apply to them the Word of spiritual Consolation; and endeavour to raise, or to support them with the Hope of their Calling. If on the other Hand the Munificence of Providence hath enriched them with worldly Blessings; and their Hearts be thence observed, to fix too eagerly upon the Enjoyments of Life; the Cure must suit the Distemper, and the Endeavour must be to rectify their Sense of Things, to convince them of the Difference between temporal and eternal; to awaken in them an Apprehension of that invisible State, which as yet is hid with *Christ* in God; to put them in Mind, that they are made for much nobler Purposes than those upon which they seem most solicitous; and thus from all the Topics of Persuasion to abate their Esteem of what so little deserves it.

All this the Text implies to be a Part
G 3 of

of the Pastoral Office, thus to *charge them that are rich in this World*; and therefore *the Rich in this World* will the better, 'tis hoped, endure it. But I observe in the

2. *Second Place*, the peculiar Snare which rich Men are here supposed, as aptest to fall into; *viz.* of being high-minded; and of trusting in uncertain Riches. The Apostle would scarce have instanced, where there was not great Likelihood of finding an Example; nor would he have chosen to specify these two Vices, if the Case had not led to them, as the most usual Concomitants of great Abundance. Were Reason alone to govern Men, it might be less apprehended, that Riches should prove the Parents of Pride. But as Self-Love is ever credulous, and as Riches create Dependences, and make Men obsequious to those who are furnish'd with the Means of profiting them; the Man of Wealth is sure to hear of his Virtues, and even to have Virtues found *for* him which are not to be found *in* him. Flattery is a Word of ill *Sound*, and yet carries

carries a *Sense* with it which few can stand against; all *discommend* it, when not many *hate* it; of those who cannot bear it, when gross and palpable, it will pass well with good Numbers, when it is more finely pointed.

But now this is an Hook which is seldom baited, except for such as are worth the catching; for Men who can requite a *good Word* with a *better Deed*, and pay off a Compliment with a substantial Kindness.

Nor will that Credulity which most Men are prone to in favour of their own Character, suffer these Men to examine rigorously the Proofs of what is suggested to their own Advantage. They can easily believe what represents them to themselves in so fair a Light; a Light so frequently held to them, and so seldom confuted by any opposite Representation.

The World, they *think*, and to many Purposes *find*, is pretty much in their Power. What from the Expectances of *some*, and the real Advantages which *others* draw from them, and from the

Unwillingness of *all* to risque the Consequences of a potent Enmity; they miss those Storms and Tempests which ruffle the *lower Life*, and which, by shewing Men what *should* be cured, prove often the Means of *curing* it.

But now a Man who hears of nothing but his *Virtues*, grows apt to think that he has no *Vices*. When he lives amidst Peals of Compliment, and converses with none but his *most humble Servants*, he loses insensibly his Taste of Truth, and grows fond of the *Knaves*, who are forwardest to make a *Fool* of him.

Conversation is become an *Art*, from which the old *artless* Simplicity is almost banish'd. Good Sense and good Meaning will not do, without somewhat of Disguise, and some further Pretensions than can reasonably be credited. What the Flatterer begun with *Design*, is so adopted and espoused by *Fashion*, that the Polite and Delicate are fond of wearing it, when they mean no more by it, than to live in Form. And as they who live *most* so, give and receive the largest Share of well-managed Courtship;

Courtship; they are the aptest hence to do, and to suffer those Mischiefs which are usually found to arise from it.

As the World is tender of touching upon their Faults, they are suffer'd to take root, and to grow up thro' Neglect, till it is too late to attempt the Cure of them. Some Rencounters in Life are of great Use to those, who know how to improve them. And an open Enemy is in this more serviceable, than an obsequious Friend, that he searches those Wounds to the Bottom, which are perniciously skinn'd over by the smoother Treatment of the other.

And thus the Man who can look Reproof out of Countenance, or keep it at a convenient Distance, grows a Stranger to himself for Want of a proper Instrument to reflect his own Image upon him in its just Likeness.

But, besides this Aptness in him to be high-minded, our Apostle has charged upon Riches a Tendency to make their Owner repose an undue Trust in them; *i. e.* To expect too much from them, as if they contain'd in them all worldly Blessings,

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Blessings, or would privilege a Man from suffering in the common Calamities of human Life. Now where this Opinion of them should once be harboured, it would probably end in a disproportion'd Fondness for what should be so disproportionately valued; and this according to the Difference of their Owner's Dispositions, would beget in some a *lavish Abuse*, and in others a *sordid, if any, Use* of them.

Whatever the Heart is much inclined to, will employ the Hands with a correspondent Vigour. If the Sum of our present Happiness be agreed to consist in any single Object; it will in a Manner engross our Affections, which are but too apt to pursue the Appearances of present Good. Wealth is the common Exchange for many and great Accommodations, which minister respectively to the Pleasure and Pride of Life. Hence it easily passes for whatever is valuable in those Accommodations; which gratifying two Principles of such Extent and Influence, are courted with the

the greater Vehemence, by those who judge so large a Share of their Happiness concern'd in them. Hence the Man who has in his Power the Means of his expected Happiness, is tempted to lash out into irregular Indulgences, or else to go on increasing those Means without Measure or Satiety: What he is so infinitely fond of, he is not easily persuaded to baulk the Occasions of obtaining; and as Sufficiency is a Word of a large Extent, and an undetermin'd Signification, he proceeds, as long as Life will suffer him, in his Endeavours to procure it; so loses all *true Enjoyment* by his restless Pursuit after the *Means* of Enjoyment. Thus his Soul (it may be) is required from him, before it has taken the Ease it promised him. It is harder to manage Wealth in a just Decorum, than it is to *get* it, where the Occasions are fairly opened. Men of contracted Minds and narrow Understandings have often been observ'd to thrive in their Fortunes, and have known how to *increase*, without knowing how to *use* them. Even they who are well enough
inclined

inclined to *use*, are too often tempted to *abuse* them by Excess and Riot, and by gratifying each unruly Appetite in its disorderly Demands. The Sense of Religion must be strong and powerful, and must have an uncommon Influence, which can keep a Man within the Bounds of Duty, who has no Check to restrain him, besides what must be fetch'd from beyond the Grave. When he feels himself surrounded with the Blessings of Life, and finds it so good and pleasant to be *here*, the Apprehensions of what shall come *hereafter* are the less likely to have Weight against so great a Variety of pleasing Counter-Motives. It is doubtless in his Power, and we see that it is so in various Examples, to bear up against any Persuasives which would draw him into Sin; and it manifests to Advantage the Strength of his Virtue, when he proves it superior to them.

But as every Condition of Life has a *Sin which most easily besets it*, a Temptation arising out of it, which is always some Clog upon the Duties expected from

from it; here it is, that the Reason and Virtue of a Man are put to their proper Test; this is the Sphere which the Providence of God has assign'd him to move in, and to approve his Conduct, by moving within the Rules prescribed to him.

Here his *Helps and Hindrances* will be fairly stated; what were his *Temptations*, and what the *Assistances* he might have had against them.

And let him remember always, that the Good he might have done and did not, will be imputed to him for an Article of Guilt; as the Evil to which he was tempted without giving into it, will, by the same equitable Construction, pass in his Account for an *Item* of Commendation.

Both these Constructions have the same Reason to support them; and both will doubtless be adjusted by the same Measure.

Thus having consider'd what is *implied* in the Text; I proceed further to observe,

II. What is *specified* in it.

Now

S E R M O N IV.

Now the Things specified in it are these Two.

1. *First*, A Caution against the Faults there mention'd, of being *high-minded*, and of *trusting in uncertain Riches*.

2. *Secondly*, A Remedy prescribed against them, by *trusting in the living God*; and by considering him as the Fountain of all Good.

1. *First*, as to the Faults; there would not to reasonable Creatures be much Caution against them necessary, if the Folly of indulging them were impartially attended to.

To be *high-minded*, should have some notable Support to screen it from being ridiculous; some high Attainment in Proportion to the Loftiness of the Mind which is conceited of it. But now who is there amongst us so partial to Riches, or so enamour'd of the Accommodations which it is allowed they furnish, as to forget that he has often seen them in the Hands of contemptible Owners? Of Men to whom no *outward* Advantages could ever procure the *inward* Esteem of any considerate Observer?

Supposing

Supposing these Owners *born* to them, there can be no possible Commendation accruing to them, besides what arises from the *Use* they make of them. But when the *Use* they make of them tends to Conceit, and nourishes Pride, they could not have sought Commendation from a more improper Topic. That *they*, rather than *others* are possess'd of them, is owing to the Chance of a fortunate Birth; which it will better become them to *adorn*, than *boast* of. Now the truest Ornament of *outward Greatness* is *inward Meekness*. *Ostentation* in *some* may force *Compliments* from *others*; but it never can produce a *real Respect*. It cannot enter into the Heart of a wise Man to conceive, that those Advantages which accrue in common to the Wise and Foolish, should ever have a Claim to his distinguish'd Esteem. The Order of the World will indeed require a Distinction between the Ranks of Men. And where a Man has no Plea of his own, he may justly call in Family-Aid to support his Pretensions: But then those Pretensions should be very modest, which

are only borrowed from *distant* Generations, or even from a *Father's Merit*; not always from a *Father's Merit*, but his *Fortune*; nor *always* from his *Fortune*, but *sometimes* even from his *Guilt*.

The Pretension, I say, should be tenderly push'd which is thus supported; and should rather meet with the unforc'd Allowances of those 'tis made upon, than be vigorously extorted from them by the Party making it: Because, when sifted, it will scurvily bear an accurate Discussion. Yet I would not be thought to mean, that outward Advantages, however accruing accidentally to the Possessors of them, should have no Consideration paid to them. Doubtless the Appointments of Providence have a Reverence due to them; and every Station in Life, has thence a Claim of some kind or other, which, whilst it is made under that Title only, may with all Justice expect an Answer to its Demands. What I am now inculcating, is far from designing any Breach upon the necessary Distinctions between *High and Low, Rich and Poor*.

I would

I would only suggest, that in Matters of this Kind and Nature, the *less* is expected, the *more* will probably be paid; and the less the Title is insisted on, the less in all Likelihood it will be examined or contradicted. But

If all insist to the uttermost, there will be a Distance and a Gap between the Expectation and the Answer to it. There must be a *mutual* Condescension, or there will be *none at all*: Courtesy must be *paid*, or else it will not be *given*.

Where there are Dependences or Hopes, the rich Man will be sure of meeting whatever he would expect in Acknowledgment of his superior Station: Whether he acts within Character or not, he will not *here* be disappointed: But let him observe what he meets with from those who are more disinterested; for thence he may more assuredly make an Estimate of his own Conduct. And if he has nothing to commend it but Riches, which few or none are the better for; few or none, he may be sure, will own an Obligation.

There is always some Envy attending a superior Station; especially if it be not prudently lightened, by observable Condescensions from the Person in it; and by a Merit as distinguish'd as the Eminence it self is. To bear high upon the Advantage, and to insist upon its Prerogatives, is to put Men upon questioning both the one and the other. Since where-ever a Claim is made with Eagerness, it is always examined with a proportionable Diligence.

The Pride of some proves often a Scourge to the Pride of others. And thus the Pride of an independent *Inferior* makes Merit to itself, by disappointing the Expectation of an haughty *Superior*; who really thus reverses his Character, and makes himself dependent upon *those* who have too much Stomach to own themselves dependent upon *him*.

Thus in most Pursuits of Life, the Vehemence, wherewith we make after them, disappoints the Success of our several Endeavours. And the proudest Man upon Earth might have *more Honour*

nour paid him, if he would *less* insist on it; and *less* complain, when he thinks he has not his Share of it.

But if we put the Supposal in another Light, and allow to the Possessor of Riches, all the Merit he can claim from the most innocent Acquisition of them, he still will have little Reason to be thence *high-minded*. He must have observed, that the Men of Understanding are not only, nor always, the successful Managers; and I would with all due Tenderness moreover suggest to him, that mere *Honesty* alone is not ever the Road to very great Abundance. With his greatest Abundance he may doubtless retain his Integrity; and he may possibly have besides a very large Proportion of Knowledge and Dexterity in the Business of Life. But still if his greatest Acquisitions make no sure Proof of the one or of the other, if Men of no great Skill in Business, and who do not so much as pretend to Conscience, do often slip into a Fortune thro' mere lucky Occasions; he will surely place the less to his own Account,

for having obtain'd a Point which Men of little Understanding, and as little Honesty do often succeed in.

Some Difference, 'tis likely, may here be pleaded, from the Dexterity of one Man's gaining with an upright Conscience, what others could not gain without a Breach upon the Laws of Honour and Justice. And let all due Allowance be made for this confess'd Distinction.

Yet still it will be own'd, that there are Men of equal Integrity and of equal Knowledge, who have not been favour'd with the like Success. The *natural* Reason of this must be, that like Occasions have not been presented to the one and to the other. Now since these Occasions are started by Providence, the Reason of the Difference will finally terminate in the Designations of Providence; leaving Men to act for themselves upon the *Occasions* which shall be presented; but reserving to it self the Power of presenting them, that *no Flesh might glory in its Presence.*

The other Fault against which our Apostle has laid in a Caution, was the
trusting

trusting in uncertain Riches, i. e. the expecting too much from them; and thence the being too fond of them.

20 And he has laid in his Caution, with an Epithet which so enforces the Reason of it, that I shall not need to insist upon any other Dissuasive. It is, that Riches are *uncertain*; they are *uncertain* in the *getting*, and they are so in the *keeping* them.

I need but just observe the Uncertainty of *getting* them, because my Text is address'd to those who have pass'd the Doubt, and are actually in Possession. But if ever they remember a Time when they were not so; I may appeal to their Experience for the Truth of this Suggestion; whether they themselves have not often doubted of those Events, which Time has at length assured to them; and whether various Accidents which they could not govern, did not much contribute to the Success of their Pursuits.

30 This it will not be much needful, at least not much within my present Purpose, to deduce any further.

But it may be fit to observe the Vanity of *trusting* in those Advantages, whose Continuance can so little be assured to us; and can so little assure us of the Happiness we expect from them, if their Continuance itself could be ascertain'd for many Generations.

Doubtless Riches are great Advantages, where there is an Heart to use them, in a becoming Measure; neither exceeding thro' Intemperance, nor failing thro' the Narrowness of a mean and a paultry Spirit.

Yet to the Happiness of Life many other Circumstances must be concurring, which Riches cannot command. But,

If all the Felicities of Life depended upon Wealth, they would depend upon a very weak and tottering Foundation: What various Accidents may utterly destroy; what we ourselves may be rendered incapable of enjoying, either thro' natural Infirmary, or thro' chosen Abstinence; what as to *ourselves* must soon be useless, from the necessary Debt which Nature will demand from us; and what as to *others*, who are to inherit

herit after us, can give us very little Comfort; because we know not, nor can foresee the Use they will make of it.

Could the Miser, who now is gather'd to his Fathers, and with so much Guilt and Industry labour'd for he knew not what nor whom: Could he have guess'd, I say, at the Issue of all his Travail, and have seen the Profusion of his ill-gotten Treasure, would he have denied himself, think we, what was necessary or convenient, in order to have furnish'd another's Luxury or Extravagance? Would he have *disquieted himself in vain*, for what would more have disquieted him, had he lived to see it?

Would he have abstain'd from that Use of his Riches, which only makes them *valuable*; to pave the Way for that *Abuse* of them, which chiefly renders them *detestable*? But,

Thus it is in every irregular Pursuit of human Life. The Thing, which within the Rules of Providence tends to our Health, when we exceed the Bounds of it, proves the Occasion of our falling.

When we use our Riches as we should do, they are Blessings; but when we put our Trust in them, they disappoint our groundless Confidence. *They* will leave *us*, or *we* shall leave *them*; and when we part, we know not what shall become of them. This is the Folly of *trusting* in what will so little serve us.

The Remedy against this was observed to be,

2. *Secondly*, Trusting in the living God, and considering him as the Fountain of all Good.

The rich Man will not enjoy the less from his Abundance, by remembring, from whence it is derived to him. But he will be led by it to consider, that the Hand which gave can as easily take away; that all the Appearances of Good which promise Satisfaction from this or that imaginary Shew of it, are utterly unable to answer Expectation; that the vain Conceit which is form'd and foster'd by *accidental* Advantages, must turn into Shame and Confusion, when *real* Advantages come to be weigh'd
against

against them. These Apprehensions will by no Means indispose him for his present Enjoyments; but they will give him the proper Taste, and will teach him the proper Use of them. That they will direct him in his Pursuits to look up to God, as the Giver of all Success; as the Fountain of Good, and as the Disposer of all Events. And whilst this Persuasion cleaves to him, he will never be too much elated with Success, nor too much mortified with the Want of it. He will not forget that the meanest Retainer to human Nature is allied to him, by having the same God with himself for his Creator, Protector and Judge, as well as the same Descent from one human Parentage.

Finally, By thus considering, and by acting upon the Strength of this Persuasion, he will be furnished with Resources of Comfort when all the Comforts of this World shall fail him; when the *Lust of the Flesh*, and the *Lust of the Eyes*, and the *Pride of Life*, shall each of them faint and languish, and

and when nothing shall be capable of
 ministring to him either Joy or Sor-
 row, but the Sense of God's Favour,
 or the fearful Expectation of his Wrath
 and Vengeance. *From which may God,
 of his infinite Mercy, &c.*



SERMON



SERMON V.

~~~~~

2 TIMOTHY iv. 13.

*The Cloak that I left at Troas with  
Carpus, when thou comest, bring  
with thee, and the Books; but  
especially the Parchments.*



HO' the Subject-Matter of  
my Text be private and per-  
sonal, and may therefore  
seem less applicable to gene-  
ral Use; yet if you will attend to the  
Observations, which may fairly be  
drawn from our Apostle's Example, you  
will find it not destitute of proper Hints  
to entertain you; and may thence be  
convinc'd,

convinc'd, that even the most barren Passages in the Book of God do bear some Fruit, and have some Significancy; if you will be at the Pains to gather the one, and to apprehend the other.

The Words themselves are plain enough; and as they need no Explication, so I think our *English* Version has done them no Injustice. Books were in those Days, rolled up, as now we roll our Parchments; a Parcel of these St. *Paul* had left behind him at *Troas* in the Hands of one *Carpus*, together with his Cloak; and now, upon the Likelihood of *Timothy's* coming to him, he desires him to take these with him in his Way; but to have a more especial Care of the Parcel which contain'd his Books and Parchments.

What I would hence observe in the

I. *First* Place is this; That some Care of worldly Accommodations, was very consistent with the Apostolic Character.

II. *Secondly*, I observe, That Learning and human Accomplishments were not wholly

wholly useless even to inspired Persons. When I have gone thro' these Remarks, I hope I may be warranted to add

III. A *Third* in Reproof of the Scorn-er; That the Licence he uses in insulting some Passages of Holy Scripture, whose Importance he has never enough consider'd, is equally senseless, rude and impious.

I, *First* I observe, that some Care of worldly Accommodations, was very consistent with the Apostolic Character.

The same Reason which justified the Care of a Cloak, would doubtless have alike excused the Provision of any other fit or necessary Accoutrement. And the inserting it in a Letter which was designed for the perpetual Use of the Christian Church, carries with it at least this Consequence; That the Duties of our holy Function were by no Means intended to restrain us from the Exercise of human Prudence; either in fencing against the Mischiefs of Want, or in decently forecasting for the Comforts of Life.



Life. If any Thing of this Kind were permitted to an Apostle; Apostles, we are sure, if any, were the Persons, to whom the Lessons of *taking no Thought for the Morrow; of providing neither Gold nor Silver, nor Brass in their Purses, nor Scrip for their Journey, nor two Coats, neither Shoes, nor yet Staves; Apostles, I say, if any, were the Persons to whom these Lessons were most strictly recommended, and in whose Case the very Letter of the Precept might most rigorously be exacted. They were entituled to miraculous Support, if other Supports should fail them; so long as their Master thought fit to require the Continuance of their Service. Nor would their ambulatory Manner of Life consist very well with the Possession of Houses and Lands, or indeed admit any Form of a settled Maintenance. Yet even under Circumstances thus peculiar, their Conduct shews, that they understood the Precepts abovemention'd in a Sense of Latitude, not as exclusive of all Manner of Forecast; but only as prohibiting those Measures of it, which might sink their*

their Spirits too deep into the World, or otherwise interfere with the due Discharge of their Commission. Now these are Limitations which the Ministers of the Gospel profess and acknowledge, that they still are bound by: Some Title to Maintenance, their Labours in the Gospel they apprehend may give them; and this they find the Apostle *St. Paul* insisting on, even when he chose, for himself, to drop his Claim. But by what Measures it shall be proportion'd, or in what Manner pursued, this they are content should be submitted to the Regulations of Law and Custom, and to the common Decencies of civil Life. They are not unapprized, that the same Abilities and Talents, which qualify them for appearing in their own Profession with any Degree of Esteem or Credit, might have carv'd for them, to all Appearance, a better Fortune in another. And therefore, if worldly Views were the Motives to determine them, these they are sensible, might have been more effectually consulted, where there are more numerous Chances and richer Prizes.



Prizes. But yet, tho' *Gain* should never be the final Motive to *Godliness* in *our selves*, or to our promoting it with *others*; there is no Reason to exclude from it the Care of our own Subsistence, or of a due Provision for those who come after us. The Apostles themselves, whose Case was extraordinary, pleaded however their Title to a sufficient Maintenance, and had it own'd. Their Successors after them receiv'd, in a more settled Way, the Oblations of their People, till the Rulers of the World came into the Acknowledgment of the Christian Faith, and made that Claim no longer necessary. And whatsoever the Iniquity of Times and Junctures may have torn from that Provision, it is still with Thankfulness acknowledged, that the Portion which is left, is continued to us; and we wish we could say, it were every where as unenvied, as it is in many Places increased beyond the legal Proportion. But since no Man who much converses, can be a Stranger to the Objections which hence are started against our Calling; as if  
7 it



it were selfish and interested, for expecting a fair Subsistence; you will suffer me to plead this Cause with you a little more particularly; for the Sake of others, I assure you, and not for my own, who never purpose to make any Claims upon your Bounty, as content (for my self) if I can have your Justice.

But since you cannot be insensible what Reproaches (elsewhere) are cast upon our Function, because we live by it, you will bear (I trust) with me, whilst I endeavour to set this Matter upon a proper Foot, and whilst I suggest to you those just Restrictions, whereupon this View of a Subsistence becomes a reasonable Prospect. As

1. *First*, That it be pursued without Anxiety or Torment. Too much Solitude is a broad Intimation, that the Heart is entirely devoted, and that the Affections are attach'd to the World in a Measure which exceeds the Merit of the Thing in question. Now if this be any where unreasonable or improper, it is surely so in a more especial Man-

ner, where the World to come, and the invisible Things of God, are the professed Subjects of our Meditation and Study. For it will never be believ'd, never indeed be possible, that we should attend as we ought to the Service of our Master, when we steal away from it so large a Proportion of our Cares and Endeavours. Nor are the Rules of Decency, and the Honour of our Profession likely to be the only Sufferers, where the Affections have contracted this worldly Bent; but there is moreover this common Mischief attending all vehement and eager Pursuits, that in the Haste which is made towards them, the Innocence of a Man is often left behind him; his Principles cannot keep up with him; but instead of them the Arts of Man-pleasing, and the little Tricks of Life destroy that primitive Simplicity and godly Sincerity, which are indeed the proper Ornaments of every Christian, but are most especially so to such as bear Office in the Household of Faith. For



2. *Secondly*, Another Restriction, by which our Care of worldly Accommodations should be always bounded, is a strict Regard to Decency, and above all to Justice, and to the Laws of our holy Religion. Our Care in this kind must never be allowed to run out into such Excesses, as to seek its Ease by Methods entrenching upon our Duty, or otherwise reflecting upon the Honour of our Vocation. No mean Condescensions to smoothe our Way to the Proud and Powerful; no Sacrifice of Truth to the Humours of a Multitude; Sin is no where to be flatter'd, no where not to be pursued with those Terrors of the Lord, which knowing, as we do, we must never cease to persuade Men by them. Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether they will take the Warning we shall give them with serious Attention, or with Rage or Scorn; we must discharge ourselves of our Trust with Zeal and Courage, without asking Counsel of our worldly Interests. This was the Example set us by our great Fore-runners,



who carried it to a Pitch much higher, than the present Posture of the World will require of us their Followers. They in all Things approved themselves the Ministers of *Christ*, in all the Tests which the Courage and Constancy of Men could well be put to. Nor Death, nor Life could separate them from their Duty; or from that Love of God, which spirited their Discharge of it. Their Affections, for ought appears, were the same with other Mens, only their Sense of Duty was higher and stronger; and therefore in Case of a Competition was the better enabled to make head against their Affections, and to oppose their Claims. It does not appear that they did not pursue their Interests, where they might with Honour and Justice; but their Interests and Principles were oftner at Variance with each other in a State of Persecution, than ours are likely to be in the settled Ages of the Gospel. It may often be, that we may pursue the one without Affront or Injury to the other: But wherever the Case is otherwise, we must remember our Rule,  
and

and must serve God rather than Man. Therefore,

Finally, our Cares for this World must ever move in a just Subordination to the Duties of our holy Calling. We must always bear in Mind the Nature and Tenour of our Service, and what will best qualify us for the due Execution of our important Trust. Now that will ever best entitle us to any worldly Recompence we may expect for our Service, which best enables us to discharge it with Esteem and Dignity. To enter upon it by any other Door, to seek or climb up to it by any other Way, is the Property of a Thief and a Robber. If the Time which should be spent upon the Duties of our Function, or upon a due Preparation for them, be lavish'd in seeking the Rewards assign'd to them; this indeed is to neglect our Work, whilst we court its Wages. If we take the Apostles of *Christ* for our Examples, this we are sure was the Reverse of their Practice: And when all Allowances are made which can be, for the Difference of our respective Circum-

I 3                      stances,

stances, there will still be left Similitude enough between 'em, to shame so wide a Diversity between the Forerunners and their Followers. Indeed the Livelyhood cannot well nor fairly be expected, but as a Reward of Service; nor can Hire be claim'd, without the Labour 'tis due to.

The first and principal Care should be always then laid out upon *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; other Things may come in afterwards in their proper Order. But there is still a Sense wherein it is true, (what our Lord once said to his earliest Followers,) *If any Man come to me, and hate not his Father and Mother, and Wife and Children, and Brethren and Sisters, yea and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple.* That is, if his Regard to the Gospel be not superior to all his worldly Views, and to all the Endearments of his present Life, there will be interfering Occasions, wherein he will not fulfil the Terms of my Service, nor consequently approve himself my Disciple.

Luke xiv.  
26.

These



These are severally the Restrictions by which our Care for worldly Accommodations should be always bounded. And when we move within these, I see not for the rest, how our Office or Function lays us under any farther Restraints. These, indeed, are Restraints, by which *you*, as well as *we*, should always be limited in your respective Pursuits of worldly Good: For too great Anxiety will have a Tendency to trespass upon your Duty as well as ours, and will sink your Spirits beneath those glorious Hopes, to which your Calling as Christians doth so amply entitle you.

The Regards of Decency, and above all, of Justice, have their Ties upon *you* also; nor can you transgress them with Innocence or Impunity.

The Subordination of your temporal to your spiritual Interests, is the common Tenor of your Engagement to *Christ's* Religion. The Offices of Virtue, and the Duties of the Station to which the Providence of God hath called you, have the first and earliest Claim upon them, and must be allowed

the Precedency, before other Prospects. So that in this Matter the Difference at last is not great between us; except as every Offence against the Law of God derives a greater Malignity, from the greater Obligations, or the greater Opportunities which the offending Person had or has to, or for, the Performance of his Duty.

But neither you nor we do transgress our Rule, whilst we seek out no otherwise for the Accommodations of Life, than within the forementioned Regulations, and with a Care subordinate to our respective Duties.

As we feel the same Wants with you, and are capable of the same Enjoyments; no one should wonder, if with Modesty and Decency, we seek the Comfort of the one, or a Supply of the other.

Nor should it be grudged to us, if Law and Custom hath assign'd us some small Proportion of your Substance. The Priesthood scarce had less assign'd to it, since it was a Priesthood, than the Portion allotted it by our present national Constitution. Take *Jews*, or *Heathens*,  
or

or Christians into the Account; the former Ages or the present; Popish or Reformed; fix where you please, upon any Settlement, and I drop my Argument, if ours be not in the Whole of it, among the lowest: Indeed so low, that even in this very Diocese, so near the most opulent and flourishing City in the World, there are above one Hundred Cures (I speak it from certain Information) upon which a single Person cannot subsist with common Decency, whilst yet he sees Numbers about him flowing in Wealth and Plenty. Here I need not observe how low his Influence is likely to be upon a potent Neighbour, to whom he is perhaps obliged for a Morsel of Bread.

In earnest therefore, if ever this Matter should be brought before you; if you should ever be desired (as I trust you will be) to assist in the Removal of so foul a Scandal; I hope you will manifest the Zeal you have for the Honour of Religion in general, of the Christian in particular, and more especially yet of our own Reformation, which indeed



1 Cor. ix.  
14.

deed hath Blots of this Kind upon it utterly indelible, without some singular Care employ'd upon expunging them: Remembring always and regarding it as the Ordinance of God, *That they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*

I am not insensible that our legal Maintenance (low as it is upon the whole of it) hath been reproachfully called by an infamous Writer, a Maintenance assigned to the *Support of certain speculative Opinions.* But if we teach you the *Truth as it is in Jesus*; and press upon you with Earnestness the practical Lessons of the Gospel; may we not then with all becoming Confidence appeal to you, as Witnesses with us, against this foul Calumny? 'Tis true indeed, that *the Faith once deliver'd to the Saints* is precious; and we cannot suffer our Depositum to be wrested out of our Hands without contending for it: But yet even this is not of such Account with us as to make us forget inculcating the Duties of moral Righteousness, by which the Interest of human Society is consulted, and we lead quiet and peace-  
able

able Lives together in all Godliness and Honesty. If ever we press upon you Matters of Opinion, it is always in order to these great Ends. All Belief may in some Sense be called Opinion; and so the whole Scheme of the Gospel may dwindle into a mere speculative Notion. Now in this Sense there is indeed the Grievance complain'd of, *viz.* a Maintenance assign'd to the Support of certain *speculative Opinions*. But then these Speculations are so involved with Practice, that there can be no Imagination they should subsist asunder.

And thus I have taken the Occasion of a small Hint from our Apostle, to assert "The Consistency of some Care for worldly Accommodations with the Apostolic Character; which if *then* allowable, must be more so now." I proceed to observe,

II. *Secondly*, That Learning and human Accomplishments were not wholly useless even to inspired Persons.

The Book and the Parchments, which were so especially recommended by St. Paul

*Paul* to the Care of *Timothy*, we may well and fairly suppose to have related to our Apostle's Business as a Minister of the Gospel; as one who being bred to Letters, made a just and noble Use of them, in the several Disputes which he maintain'd both with *Jews* and *Gentiles*: As to the *Jews*, by much Conversation with the Arguments most likely to gain upon that odd-temper'd People, he was thence enabled to confound them with the more Success; and to prove to them from Topics which they could not deny, that *Jesus* was the very *Christ*. The *Epicureans* and *Stoics* among the *Gentiles*, would never have listened to any Argument for a Resurrection, if a powerful Speaker had not maintain'd it, who understood the Force of their Weapons, and knew how, either to avoid, or to oppose them. As a Philosopher, and one accustomed to the Science, we are told that he *disputed daily* in the School of one *Tyrannus*.

The single Argument of Miracles was to the *Jews* instead of all other; and the common Forms of Reasoning,  
to



to which they were accustomed, pinned them down to the Conclusion, which they could not upon their own Principles *gainsay nor resist*. So that in holding out against its Evidence, they were the less excusable.

But this Sort of Evidence, however in itself (as doubtless it was in itself) conclusive, yet was to the *Gentiles* new, so that it needed to be deduced to them in a Method which should bend a little to their Prejudices, and open thereby the easier Passage to their Understandings. And therefore the Apostle of the *Gentiles*, we may observe, was a Man of Education, one who knew how to deal with them in their own Way, and to press upon them the Conviction of Miracles with its proper Strength.

The whole Management of diffusing the Gospel, plainly shews, that God intended to force no one into it; nor any farther to interpose with Miracles than as the Argument thence arising should become necessary to produce a reasonable Belief of it. Indeed, that it might appear how little the Success of it was  
owing

Acts xxii.  
3.

owing to human Means Eleven in Twelve of the Apostles were Men of small human Accomplishments, and therefore did apparently owe their Success to the Power of God. And if Miracles were continued, Letters, 'tis confessed, would not be so necessary. But yet even here, the great Apostle of the *Gentiles*, called to his Office with Circumstances the most peculiar and distinguished, was taken we may observe, from the *Feet of Gamaliel*, where he had the best Education his Coutry could give him; and as well from his verbal Disputes, as his written Remains, we reap the happy Effects of his Learning and Knowledge. For in what Measure soever the Spirit of God was given to those who wrote under his more immediate Directions, 'tis evident he did not overpower the natural Faculties of their several Understandings; but left to each the proper Display of their respective Talents. Hence in *St. Paul*, we have more Shew of Learning and of human Attainments, than in the rest; as in *St. Luke* greater Exactness and Purity of Language.

Language. Hence in the lofty Prophet *Isaiah*, we may observe the Style of a Courtier, and in *Amos* that of an humble Shepherd. So that notwithstanding the Assistances derived from above, (the precise Measure of which it is hard at this Distance to determine) Room was evidently left in Persons thence inspired, for the Display of their several Powers, and for the Exercise of such as Nature had given, or Art acquired for them.

To somewhat of this Kind, even the Age of Inspiration was not quite a Stranger, tho' less of this Kind *then* was necessary, when Miracles could so well and powerfully supply the Place of it.

But afterwards, we are sure, the primitive *uninspired* Defenders of our most holy Faith battelled their Adversaries with human Weapons, and maintain'd their Ground upon the common Principles of rational Discourse.

It is our Felicity to live in an Age, wherein the common Professions are made in favour of the Gospel. And yet they, I fear, whose peculiar Province  
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it is to defend it, have as much Work upon their Hands, and as much Need of human Learning to assist them in it, as *they* who lived amongst its avow'd Opponents.

To recommend its most undisputed Duties to the Delicacy of some; to rescue it from the various Misconstructions of others; to assert and prove its Truth where it is denied or doubted, and to clear its most important Articles from the Dust which has been raised about them; I say, these several Labours, will require all the Learning, the Knowledge, the Prudence, which, amidst their manifold other Labours, it is possible for the Ministers of the Gospel to be possessed of.

And shall an illiterate unsupported Confidence dare henceforwards to intrude itself, uncalled, into the Stewardship of these Mysteries; wherein the most knowing, have need of all their Knowledge, and the most learned of all their Learning? Shall it be permitted to chuse an Age for this its Intrusion, wherein it is *most* capable of disparaging, *least* capable of serving the Interests of  
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that Gospel, whose most solemn Offices it invades thus unwarrantably! Even in the Age of Inspiration, it was thought no improper Question; *How shall they* Rom. x. *preach except they be sent?* Which Question, <sup>15.</sup> if I mistake not, is by some amongst us a little inverted, and practically put into quite another Form, *viz. How shall they be sent, except they first preach?* And this perhaps may deserve our most serious and unpassionate Reflexions.

But I proceed to my

III. *Third and Last Observation, in Re-  
proof of the Scorners, viz. That the Li-  
cence he uses in insulting some Passages  
of Holy Scripture, whose Importance  
he has never enough consider'd, is e-  
qually senseless, rude, and impious.*

My Text has suffer'd as much from this daring Licence, as any other Passage in Holy Writ. And it was not the least Motive to my chusing it, that I might shew there was a better Use to be made of it. Mean-while I observe, that the Books which have been written by the truest and nicest Rules of human Com-  
position,

position, have suffered more from the Power of Burlesque and Ridicule, than the Scriptures yet have done; tho' Wit and Malice have both attack'd them with united Forces.

Usefulness and Simplicity are the only Characters which the holy Scripture aims at. And if these are due to it, 'tis senseless to object against it from any Inaccuracy of Style or Method, or from any Want of those Ornaments which it professedly disclaims. But if it be the Power of God unto Salvation, 'tis impious and prophane to abuse a Tittle of it. Were it only this, that it is *believed* to be so; 'tis an outrageous Affront upon the common Sense of Mankind, to handle it with Barbarity and Scorn, or to shed upon it the Products of a licentious Fancy.

But if it has wherewith to employ the serious Enquiries of the Thoughtful and Inquisitive, and offers to abide the Test of an open Scrutiny; why surely then the Contents of it are of sufficient Consequence to skreen it from the Insults of the Buffoon and Scornor.

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The Appearances of Contradiction between some Passages and others, have been often objected, and as often answered. The Inaccuracies of Style and Method, have likewise been accounted for. And I will venture to add, that the single Versicles, which have most indulged the Petulancy of some vain Scoffers, have no less entertain'd the serious Meditation of many sober Readers.

But they who have not Capacity, nor Taste, nor true critical Discernment, for apprehending the internal Evidences of the Gospel, assume a Part, which is by no Means due to them, when from broken unconnected Fragments, they would demolish a Scheme so strongly supported by internal, external, all Kinds of Proof. They may command a *Party*, who are unfit to be entrusted with the Conduct of a *Battle*: They may attack what they fancy to be a weak Side in a Cause, who yet are not able to judge upon the whole of its Merits; nor to comprehend the entire Design, within

the scanty Compass of their contracted Understandings.

But as Conceit and Ignorance suit ill together, they should by all Means be admonish'd to be less forward in objecting, 'till they have endeavour'd to be more knowing; and then, we may undertake that they will be less inclin'd to object, or else will object in a more serious and becoming Manner.

And when they are got out from the Seat of the Scorners, and are modest enough to accept the Character of Learners; *Man* will be ready to assist, and *God* to enlighten them; even those Parts of Holy Scripture, which have hitherto appeared to them least edifying or useful, will then have another Face with them, and will be found *profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness*, and plainly conducive to the main Design, *that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.*

*Now do thou, O blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written*

*ten*

ten for our Learning, grant, that we  
may in such wise hear them, read, mark,  
learn, and inwardly digest them; that  
by Patience and Comfort of thy holy  
Word, we may embrace and ever hold  
fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life,  
which thou hast given us in our Savi-  
our Jesus Christ.



K<sub>3</sub>

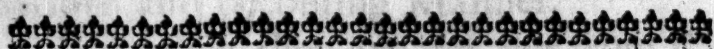
SERMON







## SERMON VI.



JAMES i, 12.

*Blessed is the Man that endureth  
Temptation. —*

The whole Verse runs thus:

*Blessed is the Man that endureth  
Temptation, for when he is tried,  
he shall receive the Crown of Life,  
which the Lord hath promised to  
them that love him.*



T. James had been advising the  
Brother of low Degree, and  
the rich Man, how to behave  
in their respective Stations;  
whereupon the Words of my Text im-  
mediately

mediately follow; which therefore hint to us, that no Condition of Life is exempt from Trial or Temptation; for having mentioned two very opposite Circumstances, of Poverty and Riches, he thence proceeds to the general Assertion, which I have read to you; and as to each, hath pronounced the Person blessed who shall stand firm against the Difficulties cleaving to either. For Difficulties are imply'd and supposed in both of them, and the Blessing is entailed upon a successful Encounter with them.

The Word Temptation is capable of two very different Senses; one, wherein it is accounted Evil; and as such, we pray to God, that he would not lead, nor suffer us to be led into it, thro' any Occasion. And in this View of it, St. *James* hath expressly denied, that God *tempts any Man*. He promotes no Inclination in any Man to Sin. He tries indeed the Virtues of his Servants in various Methods of his holy Discipline; he puts them upon the Proof or Test of their Obedience in divers Circumstances of Life, and in manifold Incidents

dents arising out of them: And this is the Sense wherein it is esteemed good. And thus God is said to have *tempted Abraham*; not as wanting to be acquainted for his own Information, how *Abraham* would behave himself, much less designing to betray him into Sin; but with a View of exhibiting thence a noble Specimen and Pattern of the most unlimited Resignation to his Will, and of convincing the World how fit that Person was to be the Object of peculiar Favours. He stood this Test, he endured this Temptation, bravely; and the Consequence loudly proclaimed him Blessed.

*He was tried*, or we should rather translate the Words, *He became approved*; his Virtue, like Gold, when brought to the Touch-stone, shew'd itself a genuine and sterling Virtue; and he hath received that *Crown of Life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*. *Abraham's Bosom* hath long been the common Receptacle of just and righteous Souls, which like his have pass'd thro' mortal Bodies, without contract-

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ing any deep or fatal Defilements: So that *blessed* (like him) is every *Man*, who (like him) *endureth Temptation*. There are three Things, which I would offer to your farther Notice from the Words thus open'd.

I. *First*, The Supposal which introduces them, that every Man is put upon some Tryal, some Difficulty, some Test and Proof of his Virtues.

II. *Secondly*, The Fitness of his being so.

III. *Thirdly*, The Blessedness of abiding these Tests, and of enduring these Temptations.

I. *First*, I begin with the Supposal, which introduces my Text, that every Man is put upon some Trial, some Difficulty, some Test and Proof of his Virtues.

Indeed there is no Circumstance, nor Stage of Life, which can be found to exempt him from them.

I. A Fullness of Fortune, while it rescues him from some Hardships which human

human Nature is most apt to shrink at, exposes him to other Difficulties and Dangers, which human Nature is more fond of encountering. But Dangers are not the less fatal, for being overlook'd, or for pleasing with fair Appearances, If Ease in his Possessions unbends the Powers of his Mind, or softens the Firmness of his Virtue, or increases his Fondness for the World, or abates his Affections towards the Things of God; these are Mischiefs which will never be compensated, by any Freedom they may give him from some other Inconveniences. The Consequence indeed is by no Means *certain*; but the *Tendency* of the Case is natural and obvious. Wise *Agur* was well aware of the Danger which attended *Fullness*; and therefore made it the Subject of his Prayer to God, that he might not be entangled in the Snare of it; *Left I be full* (saith he) *and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?* A Man who hath every Thing in his Power, which can make the Moments of Life pass easily and smoothly over him, will be the less apt to extend

Prov. xxx.  
9.

tend his Prospects any farther, when he finds it so good and pleasant to be here, His Principles may be strong enough to abide this Test of them; he may shut his Eyes upon this gawdy Scene; and may walk by Faith, notwithstanding that his Sight presents him with so many agreeable and inviting Objects; and so may endure the Temptations to which this Circumstance of Life exposes him. All this 'tis confess'd is possible, both in Theory and Practice; but then it must be acknowledg'd, that these are the proper Difficulties of his Station, wherein his Virtue is put upon Proof and Exercise; and as he behaves in this Trial of it, he will stand either applauded or condemn'd for his Performance.

The Brother of low Degree, tho' his Trials are of another Nature, yet hath no Exemption, but stands at least equally exposed with the other to Difficulties and Dangers.

He is tempted, for Example, to Discontent and Murmuring, to Frowardness and Envy, to Fraud and Injustice; and, in short, to relieve himself at any Rate,



Rate, from the Hardships which most  
forely pinch him. These are Difficul-  
ties which arise from the Nature and  
Posture of Things about him. A Man  
cannot easily rid himself of the Trouble  
and Torment, which these Circumstan-  
ces will give him; nor therefore bring  
himself to bear them with any tolerable  
Measures of Acquiescence and Resigna-  
tion. When any Way shews it self,  
which points out to him the Means of  
removing what for the present galls him,  
he will, thro' his eager Haste to disen-  
gage from it, be less nice and scrupu-  
lous than he should be, in the Use of  
those Means, in considering their  
Lawfulness, or in adjusting his Con-  
duct by the Rules of Duty. The  
same wise Author, who hath been al-  
ready quoted, as foreseeing the Snares  
of Abundance and Plenty, hath in the  
same Breath intimated the Embarrass-  
ments cleaving to Want and Destitution.  
His Fear of Poverty was founded in a  
just Apprehension, that it might tempt  
him to *steal*, and to *take the Name of*  
his *God in vain*. Care and Diligence  
7 may

may guard in this, as in the former Case, against the evil Tendency. But the Tendency will have its Effect, if there be no Precautions used to prevent it.

Nor is even the *middle* State of Life, tho' much the safest, utterly free from Danger. A Man hath many Inferiors in it, whom he may be apt to treat with Haughtiness and Contempt; many Superiors, whose higher Station he may either bend too low to, or raise his Crest with presumptuous and saucy Insolence; many desirable Advantages, which lye nearest to him, much within his View, and only not within his Reach, may provoke either the *Lust of the Eyes*, or the *Pride of Life*, to strain too hard in order to come at them. Many Conveniences of Life are supposed already in his Power, which he may either enjoy too indulgently, or by another kind of Fondness penuriously chuse to lay up in an useless Store. As there are no fix'd Boundaries to desire, which peremptorily stint its Cravings, and as a Man may always find Pretences, who is willing to use them, for giving it a larger Scope;

Scope; all the Mischiefs of *real* Poverty may meet in *fanciful* and imaginary Wants, for which Abundance it self will prove no Cure; so that a Condition which borders upon *both*, may easily have a Share in the Inconveniences of *either*.

2. Nor doth any *Stage* of *Life* exempt a Man from Temptation; as no *Condition* of *Fortune* doth.

The Levities and Passions of *Youth* will not need a Detail of them to be laid before you; the general Mention of them will easily remind you of the Entanglements and Snares, which severally surround it; how easily it falls in with Appearances, how greedily it catches at every specious Hope, and every gilded Bait.

The *riper* Age imagines its several Pursuits to have more Weight and Worth in them. And it may be so. But then there is no less Danger to Virtue from *these*, than there is from *those*; no less Apprehension that Ambition or Covetousness may prove destructive to it, than Excess in riotous luxurious Pleasures.



Pleasures. The Worship which is paid to Honour or to Profit, is no less idolatrous than that which deifies the Belly of the Worshipper, and makes a God of it. A Man is not more prompted in one Age of his Life to this latter Extravagance, than he is in another to the former Sins. The Motives to each of them ply him at different Seasons with equal Strength, and with the same Likelihoods of Success: And it is alike requisite, that he fit himself to *endure Hardness*, to stand firm against outward Impressions, to be in Possession of himself, and Master of his own Conduct, in all the Circumstances and Stages of human Life. Since the Advantages which Pleasure gains over him at one Time, will in Process of Time be gain'd by other Temptations of a different Nature; tho' under his present Complexion and View of Things, he can frame no Idea either of their Force or Charms.

Too many are the Instances to be found, in the Age which upon the Foot of Reason one would think least devoted to the World, wherein, however, it appears

appears upon Trial and Experience, that there is really most Attachment to it. Now if human Life were to be exposed at utmost Disadvantage, it could never make a worse Figure than when it is observ'd of it, that the young Man, who hath most Interest it, lives as if he had none beyond the present Moment; and the old one, whose Stock of Life runs lowest, is most anxiously solicitous for many Years to come. As if the former had really fix'd upon it for his practical Motto, *Let us eat and drink for to Morrow we die*; and the latter had made sure of it in his own Imagination, that *his Houses here should continue for ever*. This, tho' a Conduct quite out of Character, is nevertheless a very common Practice; and a general Practice, which is much contradicted by the Reason of Things, must have its Root and Foundation very deeply laid, in some prevailing Byass of human Nature, or else it could never spread so far and widely. Such a Byass will create a good deal of Difficulty in overbearing it: Reason and Patience, vigorous Stands,

Stands, and strong Oppositions, must all concur, be all, and often, employed in subduing it. Without such Endeavours, the Tide of Nature will carry Virtue, Principles, Religion and all before it. And then to stop the Torrent in its Course, or to cure the Breaches made by it, will be a Matter of much more Difficulty than it was to have kept the Banks in repair, and so to have prevented the Over-flowings of Ungodliness.

The Supposal which introduces my Text stands thus, we see, confirmed from any Estimate taken of human Life, in every Shape and Form and Condition of it: Every Man is put upon some Trial, some Difficulty, some Test, and Proof of his Virtues. Our

II. *Second* Consideration is the Fitness of his being so. Which is founded in Reasons respecting the public and common Interest, as well as the personal and private Advantage of the Man, so tried and proved.

I. The Reason respecting the public and common Interest is *Example*; which



is a Reason more extensive and weighty than a superficial View may represent it. As all Laws are design'd to be Rules of Practice, so the Sanctions which enforce them, are intended to secure a Reverence and Obedience to them. In the Case of Rewards, the Goodness of God is indeed a Motive always inducing him to shed his Bounty upon capable and proper Objects in the largest Proportions; so that here the main Reason of the Sanction, which promises Rewards, flows from the benevolent Disposition of the Creator towards his Creatures: Yet still the Regards of *Example* restrain his favourable Purposes, and limit them to Terms consistent with his Holiness; so that even the most indulgent Communications of his loving Kindness to them, are not bestowed without a View and Prospect of retaining some in their Duty, and of reclaiming others to it.

But in the Case of Punishments, which is his *strange Work*, and no Part of his original Design, the Reason of them must be drawn entirely from *exemplary*

*emplary* Regards, and from the Wisdom of his Government. Neither the Justice of God, nor that of Man, which copies from it, is a vindictive revengeful Principle. But there is a Necessity, cleaving to the Nature and Posture of Things, that the Honour of broken Laws should be consulted by proper Examples; that others may *see and fear, and do no more so wickedly.*

The Reason then, whereupon the Sanction of Laws is founded being thus extensive, by the Help of it we may account for some farther Dealings of Providence with reasonable and free Creatures; for the Station and Posture wherein they are planted, and for some Methods of Administration to which they are subject, and by which they are govern'd.

Thus, that there should be a Trial of them by some proper Tests of Obedience, before their Admission to a State of indefeasible Perfection, carries this apparent View with it, that *Holiness* must pave the Way to *Happiness*; that in the Awards of Eternity, humorous or

arbitrary Favour hath no Place; but that a Diversity of Conduct will ever introduce a Difference of Condition. And this seems to have been a Rule of such a diffusive and general Extent, that even the Orders above us have not been exempt from it. Now tho' we are not concern'd to enquire much of their *Æconomy*, and therefore have little of it revealed to us; yet we read of the *Angels which kept not their first Estate*: So that there was a Test of their Obedience which they did not stand: And the Hint is doubtless given us for our Instruction, as upon the same Foundations God hath represented his Justice inexorable, without the Help of a sufficient Mediator; *they* having none, are therefore condemned to perpetual Sorrows; for *Christ laid not hold on the Angels to succour them*, (so we should translate the Words which we render, *took not on him the Nature of Angels*) but the *Seed of Abraham, i. e.* They who are Heirs of *Abraham's Faith*, thro' the Intercession of a Saviour have Access to Mercy, and may find *Grace to help them in Time of Need*, to the Privilege



lege of which the fallen Angels are not admitted. The whole Process of this Oeconomy is founded upon apparent Reasons of Wisdom and Holiness; that none may be bold with the Laws of God, or think, that the Transgression of them shall pass with Impunity. Now

The Tests of Obedience which precede its Recompence answer the same wise Purposes, and represent our God in his proper Character, as cloathed with the Robes of Righteousness, and not depreciating his Favours by an heedless or promiscuous Distribution of them. So that such Temptations as these are perfectly co-incident with the general View of Providence, in all its Dealings, and the Fitness of them thus is founded in the public Interest of the great Community. But,

2. *Secondly*, The personal and private Advantage of the Man so tried, may well be supposed as another Motive, for putting his Virtue upon some proper Test of it. For

The Goodness of God must not be considered as a soft and passive Principle,

moving without Rule or Compass, or as utterly void of all Regards to Holiness and Wisdom. Upon *capable Objects* it is evermore inclin'd and ready to diffuse its beneficial Emanations, and to fill each of their Faculties with a suitable correspondent Bliss. But then there are some previous Qualifications, on their Parts requisite to make them meet for the gracious Purposes of their Creator towards them. The Soul must be trained up to the Happiness designed for it by a Course of proper Discipline, and by a due Proficiency in all holy Attainments. The *Perfection* of human Nature is indeed its proper *Happiness*; and that which makes us *holy* will make us *happy*. Wherefore the more we disengage from the Entanglements of the World, and the Pollutions of Sin, the better will our Hearts be prepared to remove with us from Earth to Heaven. These would hang such a Weight upon us, that we could never move upwards with it. The Love of God is a Principle too sublime and lively, to find Harbour in a Breast which is darkened with  
lower

lower and groffer Passions. Benevolence to our Fellow-Creatures will never have Room to exert its Acts and Offices, in a selfish and narrow Spirit; nor will that *Purity* which is an essential Qualification for *seeing God*, be attain'd by an Heart devoted much to sensual Excesses. These are Circumstances utterly inconsistent with the whole Scheme of Providence for leading us to Glory. A Miracle would be necessary for enabling us to bear such a dazzling Light. Were it possible for us in the Nature of the Thing, to *see God without Holiness*, we should desire the speediest Removal from such an unpleasing Spectacle.

But now such a Proficiency in Virtue, as must qualify us for the Reward of it, is an impracticable Attainment to the Man who is too soft for pressing thro' Difficulties, or for *enduring Hardness*. He must have the whole Constitution of Things unravelled for him, his Nature new moulded, his Station and Sphere of Action quite diversified; or else he must submit to the common Conditions, and be content with Struggling for his



Joy and Crown. Indeed with *all* his Labours he will never earn it; but then without *any* Labours he will never appear to have been *meet* or fit for it. Upon the present Model of the Creation, and of the Part which is assign'd him in it, 'tis impossible he should be. Because his Virtue here must meet some Obstacles; and if he breaks not thro' them, a Miracle must be wrought to fit him for the Entertainments of the Place he is going to. Now 'tis very apparent that a Miracle wrought in favour of such an undeserving Object, would cross upon the whole Scheme of Providence and the Methods of its Government, as represented under the foregoing Article. So that either he must work his Way thro' the Difficulties of Virtue, or must resolve to stay behind, and not to advance to Heaven. And can any Man object, that thus he shall pay too much for it? Or would any Man complain that he cannot have it for nothing? Is it a great deal expected from him, that he must live like a reasonable Creature, with a Sense of his Dependence on a superior Power,

Power, when every Instance and Act of Duty performed by him, directly tends to the Increase and Furtherance of his real Interest? Well, but there are Obstacles and Impediments in the Course of this Duty; these he would have removed, and if all were easy all would be well with him, and he would push his Complaints no farther. That is, if God would have made an Angel, without making first a Man of him; if he would never have *cloath'd him with Skin and Flesh*, but given him a Body of finer Materials; if he would not have brought him into this thick Air, but placed him in a lighter and purer Æther; he should have been wonderfully pleased, for ought he knows, with somewhat which he knows not, and should have passed most contentedly to the *End* without the Trouble of resorting to any *Means* for it. Now to all this insolent Expostulation the Apostle's Answer is the fittest: *Nay, but O Man, who art thou that re-* Rom. ix.  
*pliest against God? Shall the Thing formed* <sup>21, 22.</sup>  
*say to him that formed it, why hast thou*  
*made*

*made me thus? Hath not the Potter Power over the Clay, of the same Lump to make one Vessel unto Honour, and another unto Dishonour? This is doubtless a Part of the Creator's Prerogative; and there could have been no Variety in his Works, if such an Exercise of it, were not perfectly reconcilable with all true Notions of Wisdom, Justice, and Mercy. But yet in the Case before us, it is by no Means certain, nay it is very improbable, that there is any single Order of created Beings, now in Possession of an indefectible Happiness, who have not pass'd to it in the Way of a defectible Holiness. Some Angels, we are sure, have fallen; and 'tis therefore very probable, that all, or any might have fallen. And if so, there is, or hath been some Test of Obedience to the whole reasonable Creation.*

III. *The Blessedness of standing this Trial, of abiding this Test, and of thus enduring Temptation, is our Third and last Particular.*

Merely



Merely to be Instruments in the Hands of God, for carrying on the Purposes of his gracious and holy Providence, is an unspeakable Honour and Felicity, when arising from the Choice of reasonable Creatures. To be the Means of confirming any in a State of Blessedness, or of raising them to it, by the *Example* of our Practice; to be recorded in the Monuments of Eternity, as Instances of Firmness and Vigour, in the Difficulties of Duty, and in those Proofs of our Virtue, which are here assign'd to it, were a View sufficient, one would think, to excite the most dormant and sluggish Principles, and to quicken the most unactive and languid Hope.

The peculiar Qualifications hence arising for our future Recompence, and their absolute Necessity for making us meet to be *Partakers of the Inheritance with the Saints in Light*, have already been represented, when we were considering the Fitness of *Temptations*, and the Reasonableness of their being here allotted to

to us. Now the necessary *Means* to a *blessed End* are themselves intitled to a proportionable Degree of *Blessedness*. So that if *enduring Temptation* hath a Tendency to make us *happy*, it must be considered as an *Happiness*, that we are able to *endure* it.

But indeed, besides the certain Felicity entail'd upon our abiding the Tests of Virtue, with regard to *another World*; even with respect to *this World*, there is a great deal of our Ease and Comfort hereupon depending.

If we are not so far Masters of our Conduct, as to go forwards, or stop at Pleasure, we have really and truly no proper Choice. Accordingly, our Saviour pronounced the Man *who committed Sin, the Servant of Sin*. If he would *serve God and Mammon* together, and divide his Heart between two interfering Interests, there is not upon Earth a State of more Uneasiness nor Distraction, nor less conducive to any valuable Purpose, either of the *Life which now is*, or of *that which is to come*. The one Pretension is a Clog upon the other; so that a  
Man

Man does in Truth pursue *neither* effectually, who cannot find in his Heart to part with *one* of them when a Juncture shall arise which calls him off from it. What ever would seduce him from the Rule of Duty must divide his Soul asunder, if he can neither readily and thoroughly comply with it; nor yet easily nor resolutely make a Stand against it. If he hath so far abandon'd his Sense of God's Law, as to go all the Lengths of Sin, without Remorse or Check; he might with as little Difficulty have been enabled to reach any Heights of Virtue, or have stood any, even the hardest Tests of his Obedience. But then the Danger of these very different Attainments is by no Means equal; which ought to determine us to the safer Side. And if we will not resolve to play always the foolish Part, of opposing either our *Reason* or our *Inclinations*, and thence of obliging *neither* to any Purpose, we shall certainly try some Methods for gaining the Mastery, and for fixing it, when gain'd, upon an indisputable Bottom. Whoever knows how to endure

7 *Temptation*



*Temptation* truly, must have gone this Length, or he will not uniformly, nor long *endure* it. In one and another Instance he may happen to be Conqueror; but the *Security* of Virtue is at last the *Habit* of it, when it is the undoubted Principle of all his Actions, that he will not swerve in any known Example, from the Law of God; whose *Testimonies*, when he hath been used to keep them, he *will love exceedingly*; and and then the Practice of them, even in the most trying Instances, will be little *grievous*; and in the ordinary Course of Duty, very *pleasant* to him.

The *Man who so feareth the Lord* is  
 Psal.cxii.1. pronounced by the Psalmist *Blessed*, as having *great Delight in his Commandments*. Each Office and Act of Virtue, which can be thought an Hardship, is abundantly compensated by the joyful *Testimony of his Conscience*; as well as made easy to him by the Force of Resolution and repeated Usage. So that he proceeds not only without Contradiction, Reluctance, or any dividing Sentiments; but with all the Powers of his Soul united,

nited, and all the Self-Complacencies, which can recompence a regular and prudent Choice; and all attended with agreeable Prospects, and pleasing Reflexions.

This in every Part of it, is the Reverse of the Sinner's Case; of the Man whose Virtue shrinks upon Trial, and will abide no Proof of it. The only pleasing Moment to him, is the very Instant of Action; *before* it, he is all upon the Struggle with his Reason and Conscience; and if he hath subdued them both, dreadful are the Consequences, and bitter the Fruits of such a shameful Victory. Remorse and fearful Presages are its known Attendants *afterwards*. The Prophet therefore hath well compared the whole of his Case to that of *a troubled Sea, when it cannot rest, whose Waters cast up Mire and Dirt;* Isa. lviii. 20, 21. and God hath pronounced the Doom of the *Wicked*, that there can be *no Peace to them*.

It only remains, that we be all persuaded to put *on the Armour of God*; to be diligent in the Use of all proper Means  
for

for securing our Virtue, and for enabling it to stand the Trials it shall be put to. The *Temptations common to Man*, Man should not repine at. The very Design of his appearing upon the Stage of his *present* Life, was to *approve* his Obedience in them, and thence to prepare him for his Recompence in a *better*.

It is endless, as well as impertinent, to complain of the Hardships cleaving to this or that particular Circumstance of Life or Fortune: Were it exchanged for another, that other, we may depend upon it, would have its Hardships too. So that if the Time and Care which we usually mispend in fruitless Endeavours to *remove* a present Inconvenience, were employ'd in learning how to *bear* it, the Issue, in all Likelihood, would be more successful, and we should see the *Travail of our Souls, and be better satisfied*. By attempting what is out of our Power, with much Bustle and Contest, we proceed in Life thro' a Round of disappointed Labours, wherein the Occasions of Guilt too often meet with us. But by a practical Knowledge how  
to



to stand a Trial, we shun a great many of those Occasions; we do not run ourselves upon them, and when we otherwise meet with them, we are prepared to encounter them.

Wherefore, if settled Principles, regulated Passions, undivided Sentiments, and consistent Practices be Advantages of any Account with us: These are the peculiar Privileges of the Person, whom my Text hath pronounced *Blessed*. And *enduring Temptation* gives him a Claim to all of them.

Nor only to these present Felicities doth his Trial here entitle him; but to that Crown of a future and better Life, that never-dying, never-fading Glory, which our Lord hath promised to them who love him.

*And may God of his infinite Mercy bring us safe at last to it, thro' the Merits of the same his Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*



## SERMON VII.



I CHRON. xiii. 9, 10.

*And when they came unto the  
Threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza  
put forth his Hand to hold the  
Ark ; for the Oxen stumbled.*

*And the Anger of the Lord was  
kindled against Uzza, and he  
smote him, because he put his  
Hand to the Ark : And there he  
died before God.*

THE



THE Uses of this Ark or Chest are recited to us by the Author to the *Hebrews*, who tells us, that it was overlaid Heb. ix. 4. round about with Gold, and held in it the golden Pot which had Manna, kept for a Memorial of the miraculous Sustenance which the *Israelites* receiv'd in the Wilderness from the immediate Hand of Providence; *Aaron's Rod* which budded, Numb. xvii. 10. and was lodged there by the special Appointment of God as a Token against the Rebels; and the Tables of the Covenant, or the original Draught of the Decalogue, written by God, and deliver'd to *Moses*. This was the Furniture of this venerable Box; over it was the Propitiatory, or Mercy-seat, which cover'd the Law; so that it did not appear to plead, as it were, before God, the Transgressions of that People; with Allusion to which *Christ* is called our Propitiation: And at Rom. iii. each End of the Mercy-Seat stood a golden Cherub with expanded Wings, from 25. 1 John ii. between which, as from an Oracle, God gave forth his Answers, and communed

M 2

with



with those who were admitted to come so near him. Of all which Particulars we have a pompous Description in the 25<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Chapters of the Book of *Exodus*.

This Ark had been taken by the *Philistines*, in the Battle wherein the Sons of *Eli*, who attended it, were slain; upon which it was said by Way of Lamentation, that *the Glory was departed from Israel*; because *the Ark of God was taken*.

1 Sam. iv.  
22.

After seven Months, the *Philistines* sent it home again with great Solemnity; and it cost the Men of *Bethshemesh*, who first received it upon the Borders, fifty Thousand, threescore and ten Lives, for their Presumption in looking into it.

1 Sam. vi.  
19.

From thence it was fetch'd to *Kirjath-jearim*, where the Son of *Abinadab*, whose House 'twas lodged in, was sanctified on purpose to keep it; and there it abode twenty Years.

1 Sam. vii.  
1, 2.

After this, it came into the Heart of *David* to bring it thence, and to fix it in his own City. The Ceremony was very

very magnificent; and this great King thought it not beneath his Majesty nor Grandeur, to bear a signal Part in the public Rejoicings upon such a celebrated Occasion.

There was indeed a *Michol*, there who despised him for it, and became herself as contemptible as she would have represented him to be. 1 Sam. vi.  
16. and 23.

In the Way as they were carrying the Ark to the Place appointed for it, there fell out an unlucky Incident, which gave some Interruption to their Festival Mirth. It seems, the Oxen which carried it *stumbled*, or some Way or other shook it, so that it was thought in Danger of falling: Upon which *Uzza* one of the Drivers, with no Appearance of any ill Intention, but rather, it should seem, with a well-meant, tho' a rash and officious Zeal, put forth his Hand to hold it. This was an irregular and presumptuous Invasion of an Office not belonging to him; and yet there is Reason to believe, that the Priests, whose proper Business and Privilege it was to touch it, were not at that Time near it, nor upon their

M 3      Duty.

Duty. For in the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of this very Book, when David had prepared a Place in his own City to receive it from the House of Obed-Edom, we read him thus accosting the Chief of the Priests and Levites; *Ye are the Chief of the Fathers of the Levites; sanctify your selves, both ye and your Brethren, that you may bring up the Ark of the Lord God of Israel to the Place which I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a Breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due Order:* Since, according to the Direction given in the Book of Numbers, none but the Sons of Kohath were to bear it; and even they were not to touch it, but only the Staves which supported it, upon Pain of Death. The Privilege of a nearer Approach to it, seems to have been reserved for Aaron and his Sons. The Breach of this Order was fatal to Uzza; who, without any Design of Mischief, yet rashly and upon the sudden, without any Call to, any Qualification for it, and against the express Appointment of God, ventured to rush up-

1 Chron.

xv. 12, 13.

Numb. iv.

15.

Numb.

xviii. 2, 3.

Numb. iv.

19. 20.

on



on holy Things; and the Price of his Presumption was the Forfeiture of his present Life; the Severity of which Execution, tho' necessary perhaps to the Sanction of Discipline and Order, might easily be made up to him in a future State.

The Christian Oeconomy, upon a Comparison with the Jewish, is a Law of Liberty, wherein the Preference is given to Mercy before Sacrifice; and Cases of Necessity will plead with Allowance for an equitable Relaxation of any positive Appointments. But yet we may remember that the Discipline of the Gospel, had a solemn Sanction in the Blood of *Ananias* and *Sapphira* who transgressed it: So that a deliberate Breach of Rule and Order, where there is no Pretence of Necessity, no Colour of Surprize to blanch or to excuse it, may still be attended with very terrible Consequences, notwithstanding the Indulgence of our more favourable Dispensation.

From the Reason of the Case before us, several Observations may be fairly

started, without Force or Squeezing, which the Latitude of prevailing Notions makes it very fit and expedient now and then to insist on. As

I. The Importance of ritual and positive Institutions, with the punctual Observance which God expects to them.

II. The Enclosure of the sacerdotal or priestly Function, with the Danger of invading, or throwing it open.

III. The Respect which is due to a relative Happiness.

I might here add,

IV. The Insufficiency of a good or innocent Intention to warrant an irregular or forbidden Action; and

V. The Reverence and Preparation of Heart, wherewith we should approach the solemn Offices of divine Worship. And lastly,

VI. The Danger of an unauthorized officious Zeal.

But the three former of these Particulars will take up, I foresee, the Time allotted to my present Discourse.

I. The first Observation I make upon the Passage before us is, The Importance of ritual and positive Institutions, with the punctual Observance which God expects to them.

It will easily and readily be confessed, that the *Jews* in our Saviour's Time over-acted this Part; as they had smarted in some Ages before it, for their Neglects and Omissions. Our Saviour therefore, who came to supply what was wanting, to restore what was lost, to reform what was corrupt and faulty, to cure each Distemper, and to rectify every Error, speaks often in Terms of great Resentment upon this unfortunate Extreme. Yet surely this Extreme hath another for its opposite, no less fatal to the Interests of Godliness. If there may be an Excess, there may be a Defect; true Religion steers between them both, and as it is not *superstitious*, so neither is it *profane*.

Amongst all the Trials which have been made of human Nature, in the Way of worshipping a superior Power, there



there hath been no Instance of a pure and holy Worship, without somewhat of Institution to fix the Forms of it. Even the State of Innocence did not subsist without a positive Law for the Trial of our first Parents Obedience; and the Breach of it was pursued with exemplary Vengeance. The first Act of Worship which is upon Record after the Fall, was apparently of a ritual and positive Nature; since human Reason doth no more direct to those Sacrifices which we find offer'd to God by *Cain* and *Abel*, than it directs us to Baptism, or to that solemn Sacrifice of Praise which we celebrate in the holy Eucharist. As the Memory of those great Transactions between God and Man became obscure and dark in succeeding Ages, there was a Necessity thence arising to preserve or to retrieve it by written Memoirs; and by solemn Usages and Ceremonies of divine Institution, to prevent the ridiculous, if not worse, Effects of human Invention. Thus when the patriarchal Religion had been trusted, for a while, with the few who

could

could keep up to it, and Experience plainly shewed, that Numbers would not long adhere to a spiritual or rational Service, tho' with some Indulgence given to their sensitive Bent; a Law was at last contrived, which should fully answer that whole Inclination, and keep besides the People it was given to, within the Enclosures proper to their Circumstances, and guarded against the neighbouring Contagion of fatal Examples. By breaking in upon these Fences, the *Jews* had manifold Tokens of God's Displeasure against them, which they felt in a long Captivity. Afterwards it hath been observed they sunk into the other Extreme, which our Saviour laboured with so much Zeal to rectify. And with this View we are to consider him depreciating their impertinent Scrupulosity in the Rituals of their Worship, the main Lines of which he transferred, however, into his own Practice; and in this Sense professed, that it became him to *fulfil all Righteousness*. In Mat. iii. his Reformation of this Error he seemed <sup>15.</sup> to design reducing his own to the patriarchal

Genes.  
xxxviii. 8.

triarchal Scheme, which yet we should remember had its Ceremonial; for Instance, the Worship of God by Sacrifice, as long before the Delivery of the Law the Ritual of Circumcision was a known Distinction. And indeed other Usages of the Law seem to have obtained before its actual Promulgation; as in the particular Instance of the Priesthood, exercised by *Melchisedec*; probably of the *Sabaoth* too, and most certainly of the Brother's Obligation to raise up Seed unto his Brother dying Childless. So that there are great Appearances of a revealed Religion, and of instituted Modes and Forms for it, at a Time wherein we are least apt to suspect it, and of which we meet indeed with imperfect Hints and Glances only. Thus to the natural Obligations of *doing justly* and *loving Mercy*, we have also superadded some farther Cognisances of our peculiar Relation to God and *Christ*, in the outward Ordinances of his holy Religion. We have, I mean, our Sacraments, our Priesthood, our Worship of the supreme Being in and thro' a Mediator;



diator; with whatever else may be called the outward Garb and Attire of Godliness; or the proper Note of Distinction between the Christian, and other Forms of Worship.

The gross Superstitions of the Heathen World, were manifestly owing to the Want of an authorised Ceremoniale in their Worship. Hence they resorted to their own Inventions for the finding one; and we need, I presume, no Conviction nor Proof of their ill Success in it. But now, if the Light of Nature and Reason only be so sufficient for these Purposes, as some would represent it; certainly the Religion of the Heathens would have appeared to us at more Advantage. We should not have had such a Jumble of Deities, such a Mixture of barbarous and uncouth Usages in their most solemn Rituals, as their own Pens have represented, and their own Mouths confessed. They had as large a Share of Reason and good Sense, as our Men of Reason can pretend to; tho' our Men of Reason, we must confess, are pretty bold Pretenders. The Writings they have

1

have left to us, are the Standards of Delicacy and true Politeness : Yet nothing can be more monstrous nor out of Course, than the Ceremoniale of their Religion ; which with Time grew worse and more incumbred, as new Incidents and Occasions happened to increase the Pomp of it : So that there was an absolute Necessity to regulate and fix it. The Men of abstracted Reasoning do therefore refine too much in their Speculations, when they think the Externals of Religion of no Importance to it. The Bulk of Mankind, we have plain and long Experience to assure us, could never subsist without them. Virtue, which they so much would seem to magnify, must sink into Air and Emptiness, or into mere Talk, as fruitless and vain as very Vanity, if it had not the Support of religious Enclosures. The Worship of God must run into utter Confusion without some Forms to methodize, and some known Observances to keep, or to make it uniform. To think, or to reason otherwise, is perfect Enthusiasm, and a lofty Pretence  
of

of none of the best of Men to be better than they are, to exceed the Privilege of their Species, and to be Angels before their Time. But let them remember the Doom of those Angels themselves, who kept not their first Estate, and therefore changed it for a worse. Upon the whole, if we consult either Reason or Experience, either the Dealings of God with his most favoured People, or the Behaviour of Mankind when left to themselves without the Privilege of those happy Intercourses, we shall have Cause enough to value the *ritual* Parts of Religion; not as exclusive of the *moral*, nor superior to them; but in a due Subordination, and allowing to the other a confessed Precedency.

But now 'tis impossible that the Ceremoniale of our Worship should have its proper Observance, if we are not exact and punctual in our Payments. The very Reason whereupon it is founded, is preserving in our Minds a becoming Sense of our Subjection and Dependence; which will easily decay and sink, if we give our selves discretionary Powers,  
and



and depart at Pleasure from the Rules prescribed to us.

From the Excesses of the Jewish Ritual, and from the Burden of its infinite Observances, the Gospel hath deliver'd us: Upon the Darkeness of Heathen Superstitions it hath let in Light enough, to make us utterly ashamed of them; and indeed to confound us with the Wonder, that human Nature with very great Advantages of Art and acquired Knowledge, could sink into such gross and stupid Absurdities. But then these Reflections must at the same Time convince us, that human Nature cannot be left to it self with Safety, without some Additions and Helps to it by Directions from above, to preserve it from rambling, to ascertain the Measures of religious Duties, and to regulate and adjust the Forms of it. The Time cannot be named, wherein mere natural Religion, without somewhat positive added to it, hath obtain'd in Practice. And if we consider the known Bents of Mankind, we shall find it only fit for the People of *Utopia*; a  
Land

Land which no Travellers have yet descried. The patriarchal Scheme was the nearest of any to it; yet that we find had its Rites and Ceremonies, tho' fewer in Number than any Establishment which prevailed till the Gospel-Settlement. We are now upon the Matter brought back to that; only with a more explicit Discovery of the Mediator's Part in opening to us an Inter-course with Heaven. We have many Examples of the Patriarchs Diligence, none of their Neglect in those Particulars of their Duty which we more emphatically call Religious; those, I mean, which concerned their several Observances in divine Worship. For these are most certainly the strongest Barriers, the surest Preservatives of moral Virtue; which, as much as it engrosses of our Esteem in Words, hath I fear a very disproportion'd Share of it in our Deeds and Practices. Nor shall any Man persuade me, when he is breaking down its Fences, that he really means or values its Security. The Gospel-Scheme hath not left our Religion so naked and

defenceless, as to be utterly destitute of these Enclosures: Nor is the Authority of its Appointments less venerable, than of any preceding Usages and Laws. But if *Uzza* suffer'd for his unwarrantable Presumption, when his Meaning seem'd very little culpable; certainly the proud Blasphemer of his Saviour's Institutions, the contemptuous Transgressor of his sacred Enclosures, the careless Partaker of his holy Ordinances, and the bold Invader of the Privileges of his Sanctuary, stand each of them obnoxious to a much heavier Condemnation. For thus we may observe the Author to the *Hebrews* reasoning: *He that despised Moses's Law, died without Mercy under two or three Witnesses; of how much sorer Punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under Foot the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy Thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace?*

Heb. x.  
28, 29.

Thus much may suffice to have spoken upon my *First* Observation; the Importance of ritual and positive Institutions,



tions, with the punctual Observance which God expects to them. I proceed to my

II. *Second, viz.* The Enclosure of the sacerdotal or priestly Function, with the Danger of invading, or throwing it open.

For the Reasons given under my former Head, I cannot imagine, that it was the Design of the Gospel, to abolish all Rite and Ceremony, but only to cut off Excrescences, and to regulate the whole Scheme of instituted Worship. Nor can I believe that we at this Distance from the Age of the Apostles, have better Means of understanding their Intent and Purpose, than such as lived either *with them* or *very near them*. Now it is most evident and certain that the earliest Writers after the Age of the Apostles, were exceedingly solicitous about preserving the instituted Parts of Religion from all Innovation and Corruption. *Natural Reason* would do well enough, they knew, with *Natural Religion*, when once its *appointed Preserva-*

*tives and positive Rites* were effectually secured to it. Accordingly we find them labouring with all their Might, to maintain the Honours of the Episcopal Office, to fence in its Privileges, and to guard it against the Profanations of schismatical Invaders. Witness, to this Purpose, the zealous Applications of *St. Clement* to the *Corinthians*, and of *St. Ignatius* to divers Churches; both contemporary Bishops, and Fellow-Labourers with the Apostles, and who laid down their Lives, as the Apostles generally did, for the Testimony of *Jesus*. *St. Peter* indeed hath called the whole Community of Christians, an holy and royal Priesthood; as the whole Body of the *Jews*, is entituled in the Book of *Exodus*, a *Kingdom of Priests*, and an *holy Nation*: i. e. with respect to all other Communities, they were each of them a *peculiar People*, enjoy'd distinguish'd Privileges and had singular Vouchsafements from Heaven. But it is most apparent notwithstanding, that the *Jews* had a Priesthood within themselves, the Privileges of which were not to be profaned, nor

1 Pet. ii.  
5, 9.

Exod. xix.  
6.

to be laid in common with all their People, under the most severe and awful Penalties. *Uzza*, we see, did but press a little upon the Borders of it; and the Consequence was fatal to him. And those, I say, who were most likely to know the true Design of the Apostles, and consequently of *Christ*, who sent them, appear to have been no less tender of the Privileges appertaining to the Christian Priesthood; so far from thinking all Enclosures thrown open, and all Distinctions abolish'd between Laity and Clergy, that nothing seems to have enter'd farther into their Thoughts and Cares, than the Preservation of them from Encroachment and Contempt. There hath been for some Time a growing Error in our Estimates of the Gospel; we have been taught with great Industry to consider it, as a mere Revival of the *natural* Law, which I agree to have been a very important Part of its Design and Meaning. But then, I say, it hath a farther View; it takes Mankind as it found them, always addicted to, always fond of, never



utterly destitute of a sensible Worship, by Forms and Ceremonies, which should stick upon Memory and affect Imagination: Some Provision it makes for this universal Bent; and therefore with the Revival of the *natural* Law, it hath given us a Scheme of *positive* Institutions to fence in that Law, and to secure it against the endless Excursions of human Fancy. And, I say, it is the growing Mistake of the Age we live in, that this Scheme hath no Consideration, no Reverence paid to it; that the instituted Part of our Religion is of little or no Account with us; that we hold it utterly indifferent in what Way we worship the supreme Being, and that he ought to be content, if we will vouchsafe him any Worship at all. I know there may be an Error on the other Extreme, which I should not be backward to encounter upon any fit Occasion.

The Excesses of *Superstition* are attended, I am sensible, with their proper Mischiefs; but *Profaneness*, with a Neglect of Ordinances, is what I apprehend to be our growing Evil: We  
speculate

speculate too much, and we practise too little; and the nearer we come to the Wildness of untaught Nature, and to a Religion of our own inventing, the fuller Harvest may Superstition expect to reap from us, when we see our Error, and find and feel from it, that Rituals are necessary for keeping us close to any thing. This was exactly the Case of the *Jews*; and there is the same general Prone-ness in all Mankind to run from one Extreme into another. They had smarted sorely for their Neglects of God's Worship, and of those sacred Institutions wherewith he had inclosed their Church and Nation: They were sensible at last of their Error; and when they were so, they thought they could never do enough to repair it; then came on an exceeding Solitude for the Outside of their Cups, much Nicety in their Phylacteries and the Borders of their Garments; Washings as frequent and assiduous, as if they meant to change the *Ethiopian's* Skin: These *Excesses* naturally succeeded their past *Defects*; and 'tis well if our Neglects do not end in the

very Thing which they seem most fond of depreciating; and if *Spiritual Pride* do not turn us at length into errant *Formalists*.

The just Medium will be, to consider our Religion under both its Aspects, to view it as consulting the great *Ends* of moral Righteousness, by the *Means* and Methods propounded to us in the Gospel Scheme of Holiness; and therefore to glorify God in our Bodies and Spirits both; to believe that what all Religions have found necessary for their Security and Preservation, may have its Use in ours; that a regular Priesthood, and an orderly Celebration of *our* Sacraments may be of as much Importance to *us*, as they severally were under the *Legal* and *Patriarchal* Dispensations, to the People respectively concerned in either. The Reason and natural Order of Things seem to plead pretty earnestly for this Enclosure. And the Reason of Things, where Revelation is not insisted on, will have, I hope, its Weight and Influence. Now what, I beseech you, must any Man think would be the Consequence upon the Foot of Reason, if the

Privi-



Privileges of the Priesthood were laid in common; and if any Man might take its Honours to himself without a proper Call to them? What, but the utmost Confusion in all sacred Offices? What, but a growing Ignorance in the most essential Doctrines of our holy Religion, if none were set apart to a more especial Care of them?

I mention not here the Respect for Ordinances; which must sink in Course, when the Celebration of them is a mere Random-Performance, which any Man may undertake, or omit at Pleasure. This perhaps would be reckoned amongst the Advantages gained to *natural* Religion. But certainly for the Reasons given, it would not prove so. Certainly therefore the Preservation of Rule and Order in these Matters, and the keeping close within the Enclosures which *Christ* the Founder of his Church hath prescribed for her, would be most subservient to the Use of edifying. And let those look to it, who presume to break in upon them. *He gave some A-*  
*postles, and some Prophets, and some E-*  
*vangelists,*

Eph. iv.  
11, 12, 13.

*vangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the Saints, for (or, as the Words should rather be translated, for the fitting out of proper Persons to) the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ: i. e. He appointed diverse Officers for his Church, some extraordinary for her present Exigences, and others, stated and ordinary, for her constant Service; even (as the Text goes on) 'till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ. But different Appointments, contradictory Orders, clashing with his and flying in the Face of them, let no Man adventure to make or give, who would not be as Korah and his Company, and perish in their Gainsaying.*

The Way is now open to my

III. *Third Observation, upon the Respect which is due to a relative Holiness.*

*Inherent Holiness* can only be lodged in rational Beings, who dedicate all their Powers to God and to the Interests of his

his Law. But as *Holiness* implies no more originally, than a Separation of any Thing or Person, from profane and common, to sacred Uses and Employments; there arises hence a Notion of Holiness, different from that which I have called *inherent*. For in this Sense any Thing which stands *related* to the Service of God, more than other Things of the same Kind and Nature do; whatsoever is separated from its ordinary Use, and appropriated to the more immediate Service of God, be it the Time, the Place, the Thing, or Person, more immediately employed in his Worship, contracts from this Employment, this Dedication, this Sanctification (as the old Law would have called it) an Holiness which would not otherwise have belong'd to it, and is entituled to a Respect which it could not otherwise have claimed.

I never yet have heard a Reason given, why the *Times* of Worship should be esteemed more capable of this *relative Holiness*, than Places, Things or Persons. 'Tis agreed on all Hands, with



with Regard to the solemn *Times* of Worship, that we cannot decently behave in them, without distinguishing them from the common Seasons of Life, by some remarkable *Tokens* of a religious Disposition. In all the various Faces and Forms of Worship which have yet appeared, the *Places* appropriate to it, have had their Share of Reverence. And as to Things; the Ark, with the unfortunate Case of *Uzza* profaning it, is a flagrant Instance, that there is a Sense wherein they may be accounted *holy*. I could say as much for *Persons*, if it were not too invidious. *Personal Merits* are here, I know, demanded, and I hope, are usually ready to answer the Claim which is made upon them. But I beseech you suffer me for once to propound a Case to you, not altogether foreign from our present Purpose. Suppose that personal Merit were always to be insisted on, before the *Civil Magistrate* should have the Honours of his Office paid to him: I hope, and doubt not, but that in the *secular* as well as *spiritual* Government, *personal*  
*Merit*

*Merit* would usually appear when call'd for. Yet put the Case it should not; shall the Ensigns of Office go for nothing, till the People have scanned the Life and Conduct of their Magistrate, have sat upon his Actions, and given him a favourable Verdict? The Oeconomy of the World would be scurvily consulted by such ill-contrived Measures of Government and Subjection. Nor is there more Reason to expect that the Offices of Religion should any where meet with the Reverence due to them, if the Claims of a *relative Holiness* be not allowed to every Thing bearing a sacred Impression.

These Things I have thought it fit to lay before you, because my Subject naturally leads to them: I have chosen the Subject; because the growing Latitude of Opinions, and an observable Indifference to Gospel-Institutions, call upon us to remind you that we are not in a mere State of Nature; that we have a revealed Religion; an authorized Scheme of Worship, and a settled Ceremoniale of divine Ordinances, to fix the Ramble of our Imaginations, to pre-  
scribe

scribe the Formularies of our *Service*, to indulge a little, and at the same Time to regulate our Propensity towards ritual Usages.

The Morality of the Gospel differs not a great deal from the Morality knowable by natural Light, only it is more pure and perfect. Wherefore if that had been his chief or his only Business, a Messenger of less Account, than the Son of God might have been employed in teaching and transacting it.

But the *revealed* and *instituted*, as it differs from the Religion of unenlightened Nature, is peculiarly the Religion of *Christ* and his Apostles. So that when we recommend the Institutions of the Gospel to their stricter Observance and more diligent Attention, then we must truly and properly preach the Gospel to you.

I cannot, as I foresaw I should not, now proceed upon the three other Particulars arising from this fruitful Argument, which yet I mean not to dismiss without a farther Consideration, when a fair



# SERMON VII.

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a fair Opportunity shall give me leave for it.

*And may it please the Almighty and merciful God, of whose only Gift it cometh, that his faithful People do unto him true and laudable Service, to grant unto us, that we may so faithfully serve him in this Life, that we fail not finally to attain his heavenly Promises, thro' the Merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.*



SER-

FROM



## SERMON VIII.



I CHRON. xiii. 9, 10.

*And when they came unto the Threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his Hand to hold the Ark; for the Oxen stumbled.*

*And the Anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his Hand to the Ark: And there he died before God.*

FROM

**F**ROM the Fate of *Uzza*, and from the Circumstances which exposed him to it, I have formerly propounded diverse Observations to you, resulting, I thought, fairly and naturally from the Reason of the Case before us, *viz.*

I. The Importance of ritual and positive Institutions, with the punctual Observance which God expects to them.

II. The Enclosure of the Sacerdotal or Priestly Function, with the Danger of invading, or throwing it open.

III. The Respect which is due to a relative Holiness.

The Discussion of these three Particulars took up the Time allotted to my first Discourse upon this Subject. For

1. The Offence of *Uzza* was manifestly the Transgression of a mere positive Law. Since, if God had not appointed the Persons who were to make the nearest Approaches to the Ark, and forbidden all others to bear or touch it, *Uzza* had been innocent. Again



2. If *Uzza* had been one of the Sons of *Aaron*, set apart, as they were to minister before the *Tabernacle of Witness*, or to appoint the most holy Things; he had not stood here upon Record for the exemplary Vengeance pursuing his Presumption. But thus it seemed good to the Wisdom of God, to fence in the Honours and Privileges of his Priesthood. Farther yet, and

3. If there had been no just Ground of Distinction between *relative* and *inherent* Holiness, I mean between the Holiness of rational Beings, dedicating all their Powers to the Service of God; and that *outward Holiness* which attends the Separation of any Thing or Person, from common to sacred Uses; if there had not, I say, been a Reverence due to the Thing thus separated, merely for the Sake of such its *Separation*, and utterly independent on any inherent Worth in it; the Touch of the *Ark* had not been censured, nor punish'd, as a Profanation of it. For in other Respects it was but a common Chest or Box; if it had not been appointed to hold the *Pot*

of

of

of

of *Mannah*, and *Aaron's Rod*, together with the *Tables of the Covenant*. But these holy Uses imprinted, it seems, a Character upon it, the Violation of which was fatal to the Man, who, even without any ill Intention, rashly presumed to break in upon it.

All this, I am aware, will easily be allowed, with regard to the *Jewish Dispensation*; which held its Followers in strict Subjection, and in a *State of Bondage*; but then the Gospel, it will be said, hath rescued us from these Badges of Slavery, and asserted to us the glorious Liberty of the Children of God. Now it can be no doubt to those who consider the true Genius of the Gospel, but that it is of the two the more generous Institution; that it was intended to revive in us the Image of God, to make us *holy here in all Manner of Conversation*, and *happy hereafter in all Manner of reasonable and wise Enjoyments*.

But yet the known Byass of human Nature is not forgotten, nor neglected, even in the Scheme of a Gospel Holiness.

If we look back upon any Period of Religion; be it when Mankind was sunk into the grossest Ignorance, or enlightened with the highest Degrees of Knowledge; be it when the most favoured of them walked and conversed with God, or when Length of Time endanger'd an utter Oblivion of those great Transactions, and so recommended the Account of them to be fixed upon some lasting Monument; be it when a standing Revelation was committed to a chosen People, or when the Worship of God was left to the Reason, the Memory, or the Invention of its respective Votaries; we shall find them all concurring in these general Points, that their Service should have its Rituals; that Sacrifices, and a Priesthood to offer them duly and regularly, were every where consider'd as of high Importance towards the Success and Efficacy of their religious Performances. Now what, I would ask, could be the Foundation of this universal Agreement in Things and Circumstances, which had no uniform Reason to direct or to prescribe them, but some general  
Tradi-



Tradition from a common Fountain? The Gospel, 'tis most manifest, hath its Ordinances and Institutions, to a good Degree resembling these Things and Circumstances, which have just been mention'd; hath by no Means excluded Rituals from its Worship, but rather recommended, encouraged, and directly enjoined a sober Use of them. And they who best knew the Apostles Meaning; who received the *Depositum* of the Gospel from them, and were as much concern'd for its true Interests as any modern Refiners; have with great Earnestness contended for the Security of its Fences, and for the Sanctity of its venerable Enclosures: So that we should rather, I told you, consider the Gospel as a Revival of the Patriarchal Scheme, than as a mere Rehearsal of the natural Law. For the natural Law did never yet subsist in Practice, without somewhat of Ceremony and Institution added to it. And tho' the Patriarchal Religion is but little known to us; yet we are sure it had its Formularies and positive Observances.

Now if these were expedient, or necessary to Persons in such high Favour with Heaven, between whom and the Angel of God's Presence there was such an immediate and familiar Intercourse; certainly it becomes the Followers of the Gospel, whose Faith admits them not yet within the Veil, to be content on this Side of it, with the Help of Ordinances which may assist them in their design'd Advances, and lead them on to *Glory*, thro' the settled Appointments of *Grace*.

Where these Appointments are most undervalued, we cannot find, that the natural Law hath any distinguish'd Measure of Reverence or Observance paid to it, except in Words. We agree, however, that this is the highest View of the Gospel, the great *End* of all Religion, and that no Punctualities will avail us, where this is neglected. But then the *Means* are entituled to a Share of Respect from us; and what God hath thought fit for us, what all Experience hath proved a necessary Indulgence and Assistance to Creatures so frail as we, and

and encompassed with such manifold Infirmities, we cannot with Modesty nor Safety, with Decency nor with Reason, presume to set at nought; nor is Reason ever guilty of a more egregious Blunder, than when it insolently sets up its own Inventions, against the Authority of God's most holy Institutions. Our Saviour's Decision was just and pertinent to our Purpose, tho' the Sentence given by him, was upon the opposite Extreme to what we are now considering — *these* <sup>Mat. xiii.</sup>  
*ought ye to have done*; meaning the <sup>23.</sup>  
 weightier Matters of the natural Law; but yet so, as *not to leave the other undone*.

And here I shall dismiss the first Set of Observations, which arose, I thought, fairly without Force or Squeezing, from the Example in my Text, and from the whole Passage to which it stands related.

I now return with the first Opportunity to the Discussion of three other Particulars, which I had only Time to name to you in my former Discourse, as properly founded in our present Argument.



These were

I. The Insufficiency of a good or innocent Intention, to warrant an irregular or forbidden Action.

II. The Reverence and Preparation of Heart, wherewith we should approach the solemn Offices of divine Worship.

III. The Danger of an unauthorized officious Zeal.

Of these in their Order; and therefore,

I. The Insufficiency of a good or innocent Intention to warrant an irregular or forbidden Action. It doth not appear, nor is there any Reason indeed to suspect, that *Uzza* had at Heart any naughty Purpose; the Nature of the Fact spoke rather the Honesty and Innocence wherewith he perform'd it, than any Obliquity of Design and Meaning. But yet this (we find) proved no Excuse to him. Nor would the Appointments of God, in *Rituals* or in *Morals*, have any Security, if the Plea of good Meaning were allowed to pass, either in Bar of their Observance, or in

Apology

Apology for the Breach of them. We have known the Peace of Communities subverted, the social Virtues set all at nought, the Laws of Justice and Charity neglected, perverted, directly violated, and even the Duties of private Life, quite lost and sunk, with a View of God's greater Glory, craftily by some *pretended* only, but really and innocently *meant* by others. Nor will it be easy to name an Instance, even of the foulest and most pernicious Wickedness, which may not have a holy Cover found or made for it to conceal its Deformity, not only from the Eye of an unconcerned Spectator, but even of the well meaning, tho' undiscerning Actor. Now if Laws were thus soft and flexible, and should bend to the Ignorances and Prejudices of the Persons whose Duty it is to learn and to observe them; there would soon be an End of all Rule and Order, and the very End of enacting them would hereby be frustrated. For the End of enacting them being the Regularity of private Life, and the Peace and Welfare of human Societies; whatsoever disconcerts

certs these Measures, must defeat the Design of the Law, whose main View is to provide for them. But now in the very worst of Sins, there may possibly be such Appearances of a good Intention, as shall deceive the Heart of the Man who commits them? History abounds with such Examples; and our own Countrey hath furnish'd a very unhappy Share of them. What then shall we say? Is no Allowance due to the Integrity of our Purposes, nor to the Honesty of those Views and Motives, whereupon we engage in Action? Certainly there is, tho' the Measure of it can be ascertained by him alone, who searcheth out and knows us; and who discerns the remotest Principles and Springs of Action, long before they appear either to our selves or others?

Mean while his Will and his Law, howsoever knowable, whether Reason or Scripture hath declared it, is our Rule to proceed by: This we must labour to find out with all our Diligence. And we must not suffer the Course of our Enquiries after it, to be darkened or obstructed,



structed, by any naughty Byas, any corrupt Inducement, any crooked Prejudice, any perverse Affection, or sinister Inclination: These at our Peril, we must be sure to weed out of our Minds, or they soon will over-run us with their fatal Growth there. A Mistake which shall be found owing to any of these faulty Causes, will be far from excusing the criminal Effect, when it shall shew itself in Practice. In short, a Mistake which it was in our Power to have prevented, will be justly charged upon us with its whole Train of Consequences.

Now in the Duties of the Gospel, there is seldom any Room for a practical Error, but that any By-stander may point out the faulty Cause of it; some obstinate Prejudice, or headstrong Passion is easily discerned to have been at the Bottom, and to have given Life and Birth to it. This the Care and Diligence, the Fear and Trembling wherewith the Apostle exhorts us to work out our Salvation, might have nipt in its earliest Bud, and so might have prevented  
ed

ed all farther Mischief from it. If Passion would suffer us to proceed deliberately, and sedately; if it did not hold our Thoughts intent upon the single View of accomplishing our Purpose, without allowing us to debate the Fitness of the *Means* we use for it; if it would permit us to compare our Conduct with the Rule of it, to bring it to its proper Touchstone, to adjust it by the undisguised Reason of Things, and the plain Word of God; there would be no great Difficulty in fixing the Measures of our Duty, nor in determining our Practice upon any Case before us. We are told expressly, that we ought not to *do Evil that Good may come of it*; and the Reason of Things most audibly speaks the very same Language; the Amount of which is, that the *Means* must be *regular*, as well as the *End* commendable: But the *Means* which transgress any Law of God, are manifestly irregular, and cannot therefore be warranted by a less Authority, how importunately soever claiming our Regards to it. In the Case of interfering Duties,  
the

the Gospel hath fixed and declared the Preference; and the *natural* Law, 'tis confessed, must have it before the *positive*.

The Will of God extends indeed its Obligations to the original Fountains of Practice, reaches our very Thoughts and Hearts, and makes a good Intention necessary to the Acceptance of our best Performances; and yet will not accept that Intention singly, where it is not accompanied with other requisite and becoming Circumstances. A Man who means *ill*, can never, it's true, do well, whilst the Purpose of his Heart is corrupt and faulty. Tho' Ostentation, or any other View should induce him to give away even all his Goods, *without* a real Benevolence to Mankind, it would ne'er a whit avail him, it would *profit* <sup>1 Cor. xiii.</sup> *him nothing*, as the Apostle speaks upon<sup>3.</sup> the Case of such a Giver. But yet if *with* a real Benevolence to one Neighbour in Want, he should rob another, to supply the Former's Necessities; he would here be criminal in the *Means*, as we before supposed him in the *End* of Action.

noqu

Virtue



Virtue upon the whole is a regular and consistent Principle; all its Parts must be uniform, and all its Ingredients similar and well-proportion'd. Our Obedience must be like it in every Instance. Nor will any Part of it endure a Blemish, without spreading its Contagion thro' the whole Example. A Man whose Love of God shall produce an Effect so preposterous as the Hatred of his Neighbour, may plead, if he will, good Meaning, and may flatter himself in his own Sight; tho' he will deceive none but himself with so gross an Imposition; since by God and by the World, *his abominable Sin* will certainly *be found out*. 'Tis good, 'tis necessary for him to have sound *Principles*; but 'tis no less good, no less necessary for him to be careful, that his *Practices* likewise be just and regular. There is a Measure in Action, which distinguishes Vice from Virtue, and yet is not so precisely marked out, but that it will require some Care to discern the exact Boundaries between them. Thus the very highest Degree of *Liberality* borders  
upon

upon the Frontier of *Profuseness*; as the very highest Pitch of *Frugality*, touches upon the nearest Quarters of *Avarice*. Good Meaning alone will not here secure a Man from falling into one Extreme or the other, without a good Measure of Watchfulness upon the Motions of his own Heart, and upon his Attachment to *the Sin which most easily besets him*. Thus again an Hatred of one Fault often leads a Man into another. Now the *Motive* in this Case is right and just; but the *Consequence*, for want of Care, proves unhappy to him; and so perhaps his Abhorrence of *Idolatry*, which is very *commendable* in the *Purpose*, draws him into *Sacrilege*, which is very *criminal* in the *Practice*.

But I must remember, that I have two farther Observations yet remaining to be spoken to, before I finish. To the

II. *Second* of which I now therefore proceed, *viz.*

The Reverence and Preparation of Heart, wherewith we should approach the solemn Offices of Divine Worship.

The

The Want of this was fatal to *Uzza*; he rushed inconsiderately upon an holy Office, and paid the Penalty with his Life.

The very Reason of each holy Office, is securing and promoting a Sense of our Dependence on the God who made us; and all the Recognitions we make of his infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, are intended to create in us those reverential and awful Sentiments which may with most Likelihood, prove Inducements to our Obedience. A Worship, therefore, unattended with these Sentiments, is a Worship defeated of its main Design, serving no Purpose, and of which it is indeed too little to say, that it is good for nothing, since in Reality such a Worship must thwart the Purposes it was chiefly designed to serve. For he who can approach the Majesty of Heaven in the solemn Intercourses of Prayer and Thanksgiving, without a serious Ply of Soul, and suitable Impressions concerning the Object of his Worship, will soon be too familiar with him, to retain any real Respect



spect for him; and so instead of worshipping will at last affront him. The Sentiments therefore, which were hereby designed to be cultivated and promoted, will be rased out of his Mind, and gradually wear off from it, when he accustoms himself to come into the more immediate Presence of Majesty, without any Sentiments of Respect, any Guard upon his Conduct, or any Tokens of Reverence throughout his whole Behaviour. Here therefore, tho' the Worship of so pure a Spirit should be chiefly spiritual, and, if it were intended for his Sake more than for our own, should be *only* so; yet considering that our Worship can no Way affect him, can neither inform him of *our* Wants, nor of his own Perfections; considering that the Design of it is to produce in us reverential Apprehensions of his awful Majesty, and of our own Dependence on him; considering the manifold Infirmities of Flesh and Blood, and our Aptness to be affected with sensible Appearances; considering that a respectful Behaviour is the usual Token

of a respectful Disposition; that the one is apt to cherish and promote the other; that *outward Gestures* are usually significant of *inward Sentiments*, and that there is a Posture agreed to speak the Humility of a depending Supplicant; all this, I say, considered, even the *external* Part of our Worship becomes hence intituled to such a Measure of our Respect and Observance, that none may think us rude or careless in so sacred an Employment; but that the Composure of our Looks, the Humility of our Gestures, the Attention of our Hearts, and the Decency of our whole Behaviour, may proclaim us engaged in a religious Action, and that we are serving our God with Reverence and a godly Fear.

They who tell us, that *God looketh at the Heart*, should be reminded, that *Man*, however, can go no farther than the *Countenance*. That Example hath its Weight and Influence in Actions of a visible and public Nature; that a *Light which shines before Men*, directs and excites others to follow it, and to glorify their

their common *Father who is in Heaven.*

Even with Regard to the Worshipper himself, his *Gestures* are not only significant of his *Dispositions*; but have a farther Tendency to cherish and promote them. The Body here will carry the Mind along with it; as the Mind will have in its Turn an Influence upon the Body. A ludicrous Gesture not only *speaks* a ludicrous Disposition, but will *cause* it too. And *solemn Postures* have a natural Tendency to create in us *solemn Thoughts*. Such is the known Sympathy between Soul and Body, that they will affect each other mutually: And the one cannot be serious or compos'd, when the other is employ'd in ridiculous Motions, or unseemly Gestures. So that this is a Matter not so indifferent as some would represent it. But the more there is of *outward*, so much the more there will probably be of *inward* Reverence. Hypocrisy, indeed, may put on the *one* without meaning the *other*; and so it may do by the Appearances of all Virtue, yet it will be hard to believe there is any competent



Measure of real Virtue, where Appearances are wholly wanting.

This is an Error a-kin to that, which despises the Rituals of Religion, and contends for the *natural Law*, exclusive of all its *instituted Forms* and Fences. The known Bents of Mankind are not enough consider'd in either Case; nor is there a sufficient Allowance made to the Imperfections of Flesh and Blood. For after all, Reason and Argument will never work so well, as in a sensitive Compound, where the Affections may take hold of it, and draw in the whole Man to the Interests of the Thing propounded to him. They view the Case but on one Side only, who talk of what a *willing Spirit* alone might do, when yet 'tis so well known, that there is a Weakness of *Flesh* to clog and to retard it.

Upon the whole then; the more there is of Preparation in Heart, of Attention in Thought, of Humility in Posture, of Decency in Gesture, of Seriousness, Solemnity, and Composure, thro' our whole Deportment; the more likely it is that the Ends of Worship should be answered;

answered; that the Sense of our Dependence should be wrought up in our Minds to its highest Pitch of Influence upon our Practice; that God should habitually be considered as our Creator and Redeemer, our Sovereign and our Judge; that the Persuasion of his omnipresent Majesty, which filleth all Things, should sink deep into our Souls, and spread a general Tincture thro' all their Powers; on the other Hand, that all the Mischiefs of Carelessness and Irreverence, all saucy Familiarities, all undigested Effusions, all nauseous Repetitions, all impertinent and fulsome Applications, should be hence precluded and prevented: And yet after our best Endeavours in this Way, such is the Majesty of the great Being whom we worship, so highly exalted far above all Blessing and Praise, which can proceed from the Lips of polluted and sinful Creatures, that the humble Strain of good *Hezekiah* will become even our purest and most perfect Addresses to the Throne of Grace: *The* 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19.  
*good Lord pardon every one who prepareth his Heart to seek God, the Lord God of*

*his Fathers, tho' he be not cleansed according to the Purification of the Sanctuary.*

My Way is now open to the

III. *Last* Observation propounded upon the Text which is the Danger of an unauthorized officious Zeal.

A good deal of what might properly be offer'd upon this Topic, hath already been anticipated under the Article of a good or innocent Intention.

The Security of the Ark was the Thing intended by *Uzza*; and his Concern for its Safety made him step out of Course, and enter upon a Province which did not belong to him. Whereas he should rather have trusted the Event with Providence, than have rushed upon an unauthorized and forbidden Action.

Zeal doubtless means well, and the Heart is rightly disposed and affected by it; only its extreme Solitude for the Case depending doth often disconcert the Measures of Practice, and precipitate an Enterprize without due Consideration.

Zeal



Zeal for any thing, or Zeal *against* it, hath like Effects and Tendencies. In both Cases there will be an Aptness to neglect the Decencies of Conduct, and to out-run the Reason and Merit of the Case in Question. Argument is usually too slow and phlegmatic for Zeal; or Zeal is too nimble and hasty for Argument; and either Way the Consequence is, that they seldom long keep Company; but the one lags behind, whilst the other posits away before it. Among all Persuasions of Men, there will be left, I fear, some Room for Complaints of this Nature; that there is not that equal Poize, nor that exact Balance between *Head* and *Heart*, which alone can render Action uniform or comely; that Zeal is every where too apt to step out of Course, and to take a Matter into its Hand, which belongs not to it; that it inclines evermore to be querulous and restive, to indulge Suspicions and Surmises, to take the Truth of them for granted, and to act thereupon as if *Jealousy* were *Demonstration*. These are the native Tendencies of the Passion,

which will shew themselves more or less in all Men who have any Spice of it. Manifold Occasions there doubtless are which call for, and commend it, when it moves within proper Boundaries. For Example, If our Ark were falling, no Prayers, nor Tears, nor Endeavours within our Sphere and Station, should be wanting to support it: Yet still we should remember that Zeal is apt to be suspicious and to abound in Cares and Fears, not always necessary. But even Demonstration itself should never transport us beyond the Duties of our proper Calling, nor be suffer'd to engage us in unauthorized Undertakings for the Safety even of our most valuable Possessions. To *do Evil that Good may come* of it, is a Reproach which we should always answer with a *God forbid!* There is plainly no Trust in Providence, when we will force our own Way thro' the Danger which we apprehend to threaten us, at the Expence of our Duty, or with the Violation of God's Commandments. Any  
Consequence

Consequence is preferable to such a dangerous Experiment.

As for those, whose Lips have always been accustomed to the darling Sounds of Temper and Moderation; they will have, I hope, the Patience to bear being call'd upon for the Exercise of *their proper* Virtues: If they should be as querulous, as suspicious, as impatient as the most intemperate Zeal could make them; if *they* should step out of Course, and take a Matter into their Hands which does not belong to them; if *they* should enter upon unauthorized Undertakings for the Advancement of any favourite Service; if *they* should disturb the Peace of Communities by any unwarrantable officious Enterprizes; if *they* should invade the Province of searching Mens Hearts, or of spelling out their Designs in their Looks and Countenances; this, in every Part of it, would be quite out of the Character, which they seem most fond of wearing; nor could worse Symptoms attend even the most raging Zeal.



Zeal. This would give their Adversaries the most plausible Handle of turning upon them their own Language, and of applying to them the Woe denounced by our Saviour upon another Sort of People, who loaded Men with Burdens grievous to be born, when they themselves would not touch them with one of their Fingers.

What farther remains, but that we be all persuaded to set a Watch upon the Motions of this restless Passion; commendable, as other Passions are, when moving within its appointed Boundaries; but apt, like the rest, to exceed in its Measures, and to transport us beyond the Rules of Reason and Moderity? I have given you some Hints, enough, if you are willing to improve them; and without such a Will, no farther Enlargements will be sufficient or significant; Finally therefore, let us resort to God; and beseech him, who hath taught us that all our Doings without Charity are nothing worth, to send his Holy Ghost, and pour into our Hearts that

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*that most excellent Gift of Charity, the  
very Bond of Peace and of all Virtues,  
without which whosoever liveth is counted  
dead before him.*

*Grant this, O God, for thine only Son  
Jesus Christ's sake.*

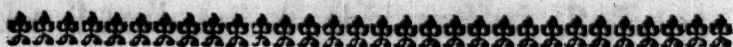
# S E R M O N IX.



S E R M O N

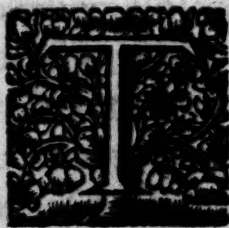


## SERMON IX.



GEN. XV. 16.

*But in the fourth Generation, they shall come hither again; for the Iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*



THE Context hath given us a Relation of God's Dealings with *Abraham*, and of the favourable Inter-course vouchsafed to him with Heaven. Here he had a general Promise



Promise, that God would be his *Shield* and his *exceeding great Reward*. But his Curiosity and his Doubts together, represent him to have been a little diffident, and not a little solicitous to know in what Way this comfortable Promise should be made good to him, feeling he was childless and likely to continue so; and therefore in the Way of temporal Prosperity, there was all Appearance that the very highest Measure of it must soon be at an End with him. The Promise therefore was more explicitly open'd to him, and he was told of a numerous Progeny which should proceed from his Loins. As improbable as the Thing at that Time was to human Views and Reasonings, he presently gave into it; and accordingly the 6<sup>th</sup> Verse informs us, that *he believed in the Lord, and it was accounted unto him for Righteousness*.

The good Man at this Time was under much Perplexity, from the Rencontre he had been engaged in with the Princes of the Countrey, by whom this little Family was surrounded, and in great

great Danger of having Reprizals taken of them for their late successful Attempt to rescue his Brother *Lot*, who it seems had fallen into the Hands of these Princes, and was their Prisoner. Wherefore as a farther Support to him in the Midst of this great Difficulty, the Inheritance of the Land in which he then sojourned like a Stranger and Pilgrim, was upon this Occasion assured to him. And upon his demanding a Sign, a Sign was given him for his farther Satisfaction. But his Despondency in this second Instance seems to have been a little corrected, and the Importance of the promised Blessing somewhat abated to him; where *an Horror of great Darkness is said to have fallen upon him*, and it was withal revealed to him, that his *Seed should be a Stranger in a Land not their own*, and should serve the People of it, and should be afflicted by them four hundred Years; (where the round Number alone is mentioned, tho' it was in Strictness four hundred and thirty Years.) But not to leave him in a State of utter Destitution, it was farther added, that the Nation which

which so mal-treated them should be judged; and that his Posterity should come out thence with great Abundance; and that he for his own Part should go down to his Grave in Peace, and be buried in a good old Age. And then (as my Text hath told you) that in the fourth Generation, (reckoning agreeably to the round Number, an hundred Years to a Generation) they should come again to the Place where he at that Time sojourn-ed; but not sooner than so, because the Iniquity of the *Amorites* was not yet full: For the *Amorites* we are to remember then inhabited a Part of the promised Land; and they made so considerable a Figure in it, that the other Nations which are mentioned towards the End of the Chapter are here included in their single Name.

From the Words thus opened and connected with the preceding History, we may fairly deduce the following Observations:

I. The Subserviency of God's providential Purposes, with the mutual Assistance



Assistance which they lend to each other.

II. His certain Fore-knowledge of future Contingencies.

III. The Sense and Meaning, wherein he is said to *love* or *hate*, to *choose* or to *reject*, any Persons or People antecedently to their respective Actions.

I might here proceed, if the Time would suffer me, and add in the

IV. *Fourth* Place, the Measures and the Conditions whereunto he limits his Rewards or Punishments of the several Descendants from good or evil Ancestors.

V. His Forbearance to a sinful People; which yet doth by no Means conclude for their Impunity.

VI. The Tendency of national Corruptions to bring down national Judgments upon any People.

I. I begin with the Subserviency of God's *providential* Purposes, and the mutual Assistance they lend to each other.

Here was the Trial of one People in the Way of Patience and Submission,  
under

under a rigorous and oppressive Bondage; and of another, in the Way of Indulgence and Forbearance, till the Measure of their Iniquities was filled up; and of a third in the Way of convincing them by Signs and Wonders, as well as of exercising their Lenity, or of proving their savage Tyranny to a great Number of Persons distress'd and at their Mercy. These several Views were all coincident, and were all carried on together by one and the same Dispensation: For at the same critical Juncture wherein the *Amorites* were ripe for Vengeance, the Cry of the *Israelites* against their *Egyptian* Taskmasters had pierced Heaven; the Patience of the one had gone thro' a sufficient Trial, as the oppressive Cruelty of the other had been long enough permitted, and stood now also ready for Judgment; and if any Correction was moreover intended to the Diffidence expressed by *Abraham* upon his 'forementioned Intercourse with God, it had now proceeded with his Posterity to its utmost Length, when

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even the fourth Generation was near upon expiring.

Profane and sacred History agree in furnishing many like Examples; where the Punishment of one Man's or one People's Sins, is the Recompence of another's Virtues; where God, the Disposer of all Events, brings on a Coincidence of Effects and Causes, whose Result shall best answer his all-wise Purposes; when the Agents and Instruments concerned in them, have quite other Views and Motives and Meanings, at their Entrance upon Action, and throughout the whole Course of it. But as the sacred History alone refers all these Events to a peculiar Providence, I shall look no farther for Instances of this Nature; but shall content my self with touching upon a few of these. For Example; Thus the Ill-will of *Joseph's* Brethren to him, opened the Way to his own Advancement in *Pharaoh's* Court, to the Settlement of his Family in the Land of *Goshen*, and to all the Wonders which in Process of Time spread such numerous Branches from that single Root.



Root. Thus again, the cruel Edict of another *Pharaoh*, who *knew not Joseph*, against all the Male-Children of the *Israelites*, proved the Occasion of introducing *Moses* to a courtly Education, and to all the *Wisdom of the Egyptians*; and therewith of fitting him for the noble Part he afterwards bore in the Deliverance of his Countreymen from Slavery and Bondage. Thus likewise the Design which *Haman* had formed for the Ruin of *Mordecai*, and of all his People, concluded finally in a Reverse of the projected Scheme, proved fatal to him who drew it, and ended in the Advancement of those very Persons whose Destruction was meant by it.

Thus in the general, when either Judgment or Mercy was designed to God's People, the Season chosen for dispensing the one or the other was usually coincident with diverse Circumstances in their neighbour Nations, whose Ambition was mortified by their Exaltation, or fed, it may be, upon their Ruins.

Even those wicked Hands which seized upon the Lord of Life, and put him to

an ignominious Death, had him *deliver'd* to them by the *determinate Council and foreknowledge of God*; the Juncture most favourable to the Diffusion of the Gospel was that wherein the *Roman Empire* had establish'd an easy Correspondence between Countries very remote and distant from each other; the Blood of its Martyrs water'd the Church; the Cruelty of its severest Persecutors contributed to its present Increase, and hath furnish'd us with a standing Evidence in Favour of the *Truth as it is in Jesus*. In all these Instances, and in many more, which might be brought to the same Purpose, we may observe a Concurrence of Circumstances, fitted to bring on the providential Issue without any Design of the Agents, and often in direct Opposition to their most earnest Wishes. When they meant *Evil*, *Good* came out of it; the superior Direction took Place, whether their little Ends were accomplish'd or disappointed; and whilst they only look'd upon the Point which lay next them, Conclusions followed most remote from their Purposes, and utterly hidden from their Eyes.

Here then we have open'd to us a magnificent View of Divine Providence; hence we may observe what a Compass there is in its Designs and Prospects, and how much too weighty the Sceptre of its Kingdom is, for any thing less than an omniscient Spirit. A Mind, upon which the whole Scene of Events, *present, past, and future* can be at once display'd; which can range them all in their proper Order, observe them all without the least Degree of Dizziness, Obscurity, or Confusion; which can so connect them with each other, that the whole shall make a continued Chain, the *smallest* Link whereof shall have some Relation, some Alliance to the *greatest*; which can trace the Consequences of Things thro' the several Periods of Time to the remotest Distance, and to the final Issue of them; which can keep all at once in View the whole Compass of created Nature, with every the minutest Incident of the natural and political, as well as of the intellectual and moral World; which can trace the Dependence of each Effect up-



on its proper Cause, from the very Beginning of Things to their ultimate Conclusion; a Mind, I say, which hath Room to hold in it all the possible Objects of Knowledge, must be infinite, omnipresent, and must fill all Things, without a Possibility of being filled by them.

Here therefore the Objection is equally impious and absurd; flies as much in the Face of *Philosophy*, as it doth of *Religion*; which opposes the Notion of a particular Providence, as unbecoming the Majesty of the supreme Being. For certainly that which proves and celebrates the Infinity of his Understanding, can never with Reason or good Sense be esteemed a Diminution of his Character. A Province, which nothing less than an all-comprehensive Wisdom is capable of managing, is every Way worthy of him, who is alone possessed of it. A Sceptre, which requires Almighty Power to wield it, can never disparage the Hand of Omnipotence. Now this is most truly and properly the Case before us. If God were not infinite

infinite in the Extent and Compass of his Knowledge; it were impossible that he should govern the Worlds he hath created. But the Infinity of his Knowledge and the Omnipresence of his Spirit, not only qualify him for sustaining this mighty Part with perfect Ease, but make it utterly impossible that any thing should escape his Notice; even as impossible as it is, that a Man with his Eyes sound and open should not see the Light, when it shines in upon him with a meridian Splendor. The Reason why we do not *actually* know every Thing, which *possibly* we *might* know, if we would attend to it, is the Narrowness and Limitation of our intellectual Powers; so that *greater* Matters leave in our Minds no Room for *less*; and if we should attend to the *one* we should lose Sight of the *other*: Wherefore under such an Incapacity for attending *both* of them, we do well and wisely in bestowing our Application upon Things of the greatest Moment, which will unavoidably occasion a Neglect of smaller Concernments. But then this

unavoidable *Neglect* is an Instance and an Argument of our Imperfection; and if we could as easily apply our Thoughts to *every* thing as we do to *any* thing, it would speak us endowed with much larger and more comprehensive Powers of Understanding. These, we conceive, are with God, in their highest and most elevated Perfection.

Accordingly the Scriptures have told us, That *all his Works from the Beginning of the World are known unto him*; neither is there any Creature which is not manifest in his Sight; but all Things are naked and open unto the Eyes of him with whom we have to do: That he saw our Substance when 'twas yet imperfect; and in his Book are all our Members written: That he knoweth our down-sitting and our up-rising; and understandeth our Thoughts long before: That he is about our Path and about our Bed; and spieth out all our Ways; neither is there a Word in our Tongue, but he knoweth it altogether: That by him are our Actions weigh'd, and That he pondereth all our Goings.

What



What a Guard and Watch should be set upon our Thoughts, and Words, and Actions, which are to pass under the Scrutiny of such an awful Judge, is a Reflexion which we cannot miss of, when this Argument is before us. If the Presence of a Man like ourselves, encompass'd with the same Infirmities, and who hath no Power to call us to Account for our Miscarriages, would, however, deter or shame us from many Instances of Wickedness; how much more should the perpetual Presence of God our Judge, make us tremble at the Thought of his Power and Vengeance, and weaken the Influence of the strongest Temptation? To transgress under the very Eye of the Magistrate, when the Sword of Justice hangs over the Criminal's Head, is a Degree of Presumption, which speaks an unusual Progress and Hardness in Guilt. Now every Offence against the Laws of God, is loaded with this terrible Aggravation. Yet will not the *Unwise among the People take heed*; but go on to say in their scornful Language; *Tush, the Lord will*

*will not see, neither will the God of Jacob regard it.* Forgetting all the while, that he who *made the Eye* must *see*; that he who *formed the Ear* must *hear*; and that he who hath taught *Man Knowledge*, will certainly *punish* their foul Abuse of it.

I go on here no further with this Reflexion, because it ariseth only from an incidental Appurtenance to our present Argument; but proceed from it, to the

II. *Second* Observation made upon my Text, *viz.* God's *certain* Fore-knowledge of future *Contingencies*. Now,

1. The Text most evidently implies it, as do diverse other Passages in Holy Writ.

2. The World could not be govern'd without it; since the Counsels of Providence must be frequently plunged and disconcerted, if the several Results of human Action were beforehand unknown to it: And,

3. When from these Views the *Necessity* of the Thing is once established, *Difficulties* in the *Manner* of it should not weaken our Assent to it.

1. I say, the Text implies it clearly, as foretelling an Event depending upon the Exercise of human Liberty; that in the *fourth Generation the Iniquity of the Amorites* would be filled up: Nor is it credible from the Manner of this Prediction, that the Treatment the *Israelites* were to receive from their *Egyptian Masters*, was even then a Secret to the Fore-knowledge of God: And the Context most apparently assures us that it was not; since in the 13th and 14th Verses of the Chapter, we have an Account of what was afterwards to happen in *Egypt*, which looks more like an *History* of somewhat past than a *Prophecy* of any thing to come. *Know* (saith God to *Abraham*) of a *Surety* (where the *Certainty* of the Prediction deserves your Notice) *that thy Seed shall be a Stranger in a Land which is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred Years: And also that Nation whom they shall serve will I judge; and afterwards they shall come out with great Substance: Where we have a plain and strong Allusion to the main Circumstances*



cumstances which so long after attended the Deliverance of the *Israelites from their House of Bondage*. In human Account and Reckoning the Affliction of the *Israelites* there was as mere a Contingency, depended as much upon the free Choice of diverse Princes successively reigning in *Egypt*, as any thing besides it was, or could be. Yet this appears to have been clearly and certainly fore-known by God. Whatever Prophecies there are in the *Old Testament*, relating to Events wherein the Exercise of human Liberty is concerned, are all of them Evidences in favour of this Assertion. These are many and various, and will easily occur to your Thoughts, as you employ them upon the Argument. But there is one particularly which I cannot but name to you, because it is so very explicit and express, in the Nomination of the Person who was to deliver the House of *Jacob* from their Captivity, and to be the Restorer of their Paths to dwell in. *I am the Lord* (saith God by his Prophet *Isaiah*) *who saith of Cyrus, he is my Shepherd, and shall perform*

*form all my Pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the Temple, Thy Foundation shall be laid: And again in the following Chapter; Thus saith the* Isa. xlv. 4: *Lord to his Anointed, to Cyrus, whose right Hand I have holden, to subdue Nations before him: For Jacob my Servant's sake and Israel mine Elect, I have even called thee by thy Name, I have surnamed thee; tho' thou hast not known me.*

Now this Prophecy must have bore Date about one hundred Years before the Birth of Cyrus; where we find their Deliverance foretold to them, even when they were not as yet brought into Captivity. Now, I say, a Prediction so *particular* and express, must imply a very *particular* Fore-knowledge of the Event foretold by it. And the Event foretold by it depended entirely upon the Enterprizes which Cyrus should undertake; as those Enterprizes a good deal depended upon the *free Actions* of the several Princes who were his Contemporaries; for these, if they had acted otherwise than they did, would have disconcerted the whole Scheme, whereupon the Truth of this Prophecy concerning him was founded. So that not only the Heart  
of

of *Cyrus*, in all its various Movements was foreknown by God; but the Hearts of all those Princes, whose Conduct open'd the Occasions to his Greatness, were likewise manifest in the Sight of God, *when as yet there were none of them*. This is an Observation which is founded in *Fact*; and therefore ten thousand Subtleties of *reasoning* against it will be as nothing. Even if *Fact* in this Case did not assist us, the *Reason of the Thing* would

2. Evince its Truth to us, that so it must be, upon any Supposal that God is the Governour of the World, and exercises a particular Providence over it. For the Actions of free Creatures in this lowest World, are the fittest Employments of Divine Providence. The *Moon*, by a Law once appointed for her at the Creation, *observes her appointed Seasons*, and by the same the *Sun knoweth his going down*. Natural Causes work mechanically, by a Necessity, once for all fixed upon them from a Decree of the most high; so that a particular Providence seems not here to have any fit Object whereupon to employ its Powers. But *Free-Agents* move so variously, with such an Infinity



nity of Design and Meaning; and the Connection of the several Links in the Chain of Events, with *their* Purposes and Counsels, from the Beginning to the Consummation of all Things, is indeed a Scene so wide and spacious, that an infinite Understanding may well and fitly take the chief Part in it.

The Issue of Things results so usually from the Exercise of human Liberty, that, if it were not foreseen how that Liberty would be exercised, it would be impossible to sit with Ease or with Advantage at the Helm of Government. So many Things would happen quite contrary to an *uncertain* Expectation or to mere *probable* Conjecture; there is so much of Humour and of Caprice in all human Counsels, that no Estimate could possibly be taken, no Scheme be formed, but what must lie open to infinite Uncertainties, and plunge the Measures of the *wisest*, if not an *all-wise*, and therefore *all-knowing* Governour. It would not be practicable to lay the Foundation of *future* Events, in any *present* Incidents, or Junctures, if it were not cer-  
tainly

*tainly* foreknown by Divine Providence, what Turn such Incidents would take from the Management of the Persons, who are to bear their Part in them. And any Confusion of Thought, any Perplexity of Counsel, any Darkness or Uncertainty in the Knowledge of God, would speak a Deficiency and Imperfection no Way consistent with the Honour of his glorious Attributes. Now

3. To the *Reasoning*, which stands thus supported by undoubted *Facts*, it ought to be no Objection, that there are *Difficulties* in it, which we cannot readily resolve. For

If there be a Certainty in *Fact*, that the Fore-knowledge of God extends it self to future Contingencies; and if there be a Certainty in Sense and Feeling, that human Actions are free, and human Agents may either do, or forbear at Pleasure; it is then no just Impeachment of the one, or of the other, that we cannot find out a Way of reconciling them together: Yet after all, it will not be easy to shew, that the Fore-knowledge of God hath any causal Influence

Influence upon the Events and Incidents which are so foreknown by him. And a causal Influence is the only Thing which can be supposed to affect the Freedom of the Agents concerned in them. One Man may *probably* fore-know what another Man will *probably* do upon such or such an Occasion: Nay in some Cases this Fore-knowledge may fall very little, if any thing, short of *Certainty*. But yet this *Foreknowledge* on the *one* Part is no *Cause* of the *Action* on the *other*. The *Action* may be freely chosen, notwithstanding that it was so fore-known. A Spectator may see and observe with *Certainty*, what is acted upon the Scene before him, without having any Hand in it. He may know with *Certainty* what is *past*, and yet what is *past* must have been perfectly independent on his *Afterknowledge* of it. The *Time* of knowing it, whether it were *before* or *afterwards*, one would think, should have like, that is indeed no Effect at all upon the *Action*, or in any Manner impeach the Freedom wherewith it is performed. That



God foreknows with *Certainty* those Events which human Foresight can only view as *probable* and therefore *contingent*, is owing to the singular Fullness and Immenfity of his Understanding; when yet neither the *human*, nor the divine Preſcience, are productive of the Event, which is *ſo foreknown by either*. It would plainly come to paſs whether it were *fore-known* or not. But it is no Wonder we ſhould not diſtinctly perceive the Manner and Proceſs of infinite Knowledge. In theſe *deep Things of God*, which his *Spirit* alone can ſearch to the Bottom, we muſt be content to look upon the Surface only; and even there be cautious for fear of being giddy.

Proceed we therefore to the  
 III. *Third* general Obſervation which was made upon the Text, *viz.* The Senſe and Meaning, wherein God is ſaid to *love or hate*, to *chufe* or to *rejeſt* any Perſons or People, antecedently to their reſpective Actions.

By the *determinate Counſel* and *Fore-knowledge* of God, the Decree was pronounc-

ced, that the *Israelites* should be delivered, and the *Amorites* be conquered, long before the Persons were born who were to be afterwards interested in the one and the other Dispensation. He rejected the one and chose the other, before either of their Actions cou'd entitle 'em to his Favour or render them obnoxious to his Displeasure. Thus, when they were just entering upon the promised Land, *Moses* bid the *Jews*, understand, that the Lord <sup>Deut. ix. 6, 5.</sup> *their God* gave them not that good Land to possess it, for their Righteousness; since they were a stiff-necked People; but that he might perform the Promise which he swore unto their Fathers, *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. Thus again, we read God saying to his Prophet *Jeremiah*; <sup>Jer. i. 5.</sup> Before I formed thee in the Belly, I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the Womb, I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a Prophet unto the Nations. God, it seems, had predestinated him to this Office in his Church, before his Birth. Once more, from a Topic a-kin to the foregoing Observation, we find *St. Paul* reasoning with the *Romans*, that God might <sup>Rom. ix.</sup>

as well and justly reject the *Jews* from being his People, as he once had chosen them to be so; that he had as much Right in the Case of the *Gentiles*, to call them his People which were not his People, and her beloved which was not beloved, as he had in the Case of the *Israelites* before them; that as he had loved *Jacob* and hated *Esau*, so the Time might come, when this Love should be suspended from the *one*, and this Hatred be moved from the *other*. For both there were doubtless wise, tho' hidden, Reasons; and it was enough to silence the bold Objector, that God would have Mercy on whom he would have Mercy; that like a Potter he had Power over his own Clay, to make of the same Lump one Vessel unto Honour and another unto Dishonour. But then this whole Procedure respected only the outward Privileges of the Church militant upon Earth, *i. e.* God would vouchsafe the Favour of his Oracles, where, and as he pleased, without accounting to his Creatures for his several Dispensations. The Apostle's Argument required him to say no more; and the whole



whole Course of it extends no farther than to the Removal of those Prejudices, which the *Jews* had conceived against the Admission of the *Gentiles* into his Church and Household; with the State of particular Persons in another World, neither the Argument itself, nor any Expressions used in it, speak him to have meddled. *That* was still left to turn upon the Use they should make of the Light afforded them, when the Measure of their Helps and Hindrances should be fairly adjusted.

It is of great Importance to the Interests of Virtue, that the Dealings of God, respecting our present and future State, should not be confounded with each other, that he should not be represented as distributing his final Awards of Judgment or Mercy, without any Regard to the Behaviour of the Persons concerned in them; that his *Purposes of Election* should not appear to have any farther View, than the Privilege of some external Advantages, vouchsafed to one People before, and rather than, another; that he should not be

thought to have any particular Favou-  
rites in the Kingdom of *Glory*, who  
become not so by a previous Trial  
and Approbation in some or other of  
the manifold Methods of Grace. As to  
the Variety of those Methods, and the  
Difference of Opportunities, wherewith  
different Persons at different Times are  
put upon the Test and Trial of their  
several Virtues; we can easily conceive  
a Day may come, when all of them  
shall be adjusted by a righteous impar-  
tial Judgment. Our Part is to improve  
meanwhile the Talents lent to each of  
us by a gracious Providence; and as we  
have received the Light to walk in it;  
to live as becomes a People, whom the  
*God and Father of our Lord and Saviour,*  
*hath vouchsafed to enrich with all spiritual*  
*Blessing in heavenly Things thro' Christ;*  
lest he not only remove from us our  
national and common Advantages; but  
pursue those farther with his everlast-  
ing Vengeance, who here contribute  
to bring down upon themselves and  
others his temporal Judgments.

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# S E R M O N IX.

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I have just mentioned to you three other Observations as founded in my Text; but as the Time will not suffer me now to proceed with them, I must refer them to some other Opportunity.



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S E R M O N

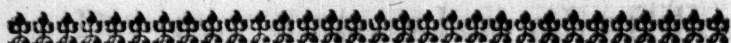
II. His



I have just mentioned to you three  
other Observations as touching in



## SERMON X.



GEN. XV. 16.

*But in the fourth Generation, they  
shall come hither again; for the  
Iniquity of the Amorites is not yet  
full.*



UPON these Words the  
three following Observa-  
tions have been already  
made and spoken to.

I. The Subserviency of  
God's providential Purposes; with the  
mutual Assistance which they lend to  
each other.

II. His

II. His certain Fore-knowledge of future Contingencies.

III. The Sense and Meaning wherein he is said to love or hate, to chuse or to reject any Persons or People, antecedently to their respective Actions.

How, and in what Construction these Remarks are true in themselves, and duly founded in the Text, was particularly deduced to you in my last Discourse upon it.

I had only then Time to name to you, without pursuing them any farther, three more Observations, which the Text hath given us a fair Handle for considering.

I. The *First* of these was, The Measures and the Conditions, whereunto God limits his Rewards or Punishments of the several Descendents from good or evil Ancestors.

II. The *Second* was, His Forbearance to a sinful People; which yet doth by no Means conclude for their Impunity.

III. The *Third* and last was, The Tendency

dency of national Corruptions to bring down national Judgments.

I. I begin with the Measures and Conditions whereunto God limits his Rewards or Punishments of the several Descendents from good or evil Ancestors.

I. Here then I observe, in the *First* Place, of such Rewards and Punishments, that they never are extended beyond *the Life which now is*. The Case to which the Text alluded manifestly went no farther. Whether *Mercy* were meant by it to the Seed of *Abraham*, or *Judgment* to a People *laden* (as the *Amorites* were) *with Iniquity*, and ripe for Vengeance; the *Possession* of the promised Land was the Favour vouchsafed to the *one*; as the *Loss* of it was the Penalty inflicted upon the *other*.

The Founder of a Family revolting from God and his true Religion, will indeed unavoidably lay his Posterity under spiritual Disadvantages: But then in *another World* they will account for no more Talents than their Trust amounted to; and what they wanted *here* thro' a Fault,



a Fault, *not their own*, *he*, thro' whose Fault they wanted it, will *alone* account for *hereafter*. As on the other hand, the Founder of a Family adhering to God and his true Religion, or retrieving the Knowledge of both when sunk into Barbarism and Oblivion, will necessarily entail upon his Descendents great Helps to Virtue, and the *Means* of a favourable Acceptance before their holy Judge. But still the *Use* they shall make of these happy *Means*, and the honest Discharge of this mighty Trust are also the Circumstances whereupon their future and final State will be found depending, when their great Account shall be audited, and the Measure of their Helps and Hindrances proportion'd and adjusted. And perhaps it may be found more tolerable for *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* in the *Day of Judgment* than for them. They, who if they had seen our Saviour's mighty Works would have *repented in Sackcloth and Ashes*, will certainly appear before his awful Tribunal with more Advantage than they who saw them, but repented not.

So that we may observe, the real Advantage of external Privileges depends entirely upon the Use we shall make of them, and can only be known by their final and last Result.

Wherefore, when in regard to the *distinguish'd* Piety of some *Hero* in Religion, God shall vouchsafe *distinguish'd* Helps and Advantages to his Posterity; or, when in pursuing some first-rate Sinners with exemplary Vengeance, their Descendents shall be involved in the Consequences of their Guilt; *these penal Consequences*, as well as *those favourable Helps*, are limited most plainly to the Issues of our present State. Our *future Condition* is so little affected by them, that what seems *here judicial* and designed in *Punishment*, may prove hereafter an Article in our *Favour*; since a Want of Means will end more happily than our Abuse of them: As again, what seems *here intended* for our *Health* and our *Advantage*, may be found hereafter the Occasion of our *falling* with the *heavier Weight*, and of sinking us *deeper* into the *nethermost Hell*.

Whatever

Whatever then may be the Occasion, or the Motive to Providence, for allotting us to this or that Circumstance of Life and Fortune, and outward Opportunities; tho' the Behaviour perhaps of our Ancestors pleasing God, and walking with him, or straying from his Ways, and striving against his Spirit; tho' this, I say, may prove the accidental Cause of our being planted here upon Ground of more or less Advantage; yet still it is in our Power finally to turn either the *Judgment* into *Mercy*, or the *intended Favour* into an *eventual Mischiefs*. If a Variety of Dealings was in this Life necessary or expedient, a Reason taken from any Circumstance may be conceived sufficient to determine the Choice of Providence, in the *Times and Seasons and the Bounds of our Habitation*.

But our *future State*, we should always remember, is to take its Allotment from our *personal* Conduct upon the Post which is here assigned to us. The Behaviour of a third Person may be the Reason why, amidst a *great Variety* of Stations, *this* is rather chosen for us



us than *another*; and some Objection, when we have much a Mind to it, may be found for *any*, which could be given us in a World of Imperfection. Our Business upon the Scene before us, is not to chuse our Part, but to behave upon that which the great Conductor shall point out for us, with our best Address and Diligence. Then we may be sure, whatever were the Views of the chief all-wise Designer, in planting us upon a *fruitful* or *barren* Soil; the final Issue will be favourable. An Increase of an *hundred-fold* is more reasonably expected from a Vineyard, which hath been much cultivated, than an Improvement of *thirty* from another which hath been long neglected. But farther, and

2. *Secondly*, Even these *temporal Judgments* or *Mercies* of God, which are thus severally dispensed to the Descendents from good or evil Ancestors, are not so peremptorily fixed by a Decree of Providence, but that the Behaviour of such Descendents may procure a Change in the *one* and in the *other*. Indeed upon the *certain Foreknowledge* of their respective

ctive Actions, God peremptorily declared to *Abraham*, that in the *fourth Generation* the *Amorites* should be dispossessed of the Land which they then inhabited; but, I say, it was upon a certain *Foresight* that the *Measure of their Iniquities* would by that Time be full; as it was upon a like Prospect of the several Trials which the *Israelites* were to pass, that he assured their great Ancestor they should then be deliver'd from their *House of Bondage*. Otherwise, we have the Rule and Standard of God's Dealings recorded by his Prophet — *At what Instant* (saith he) *I* Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy it: If that Nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil, I will repent of the Evil which I thought to do unto them. And at what Instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to build and to plant it: If it do Evil in my Sight, that it obey not my Voice, then will I repent of the Good wherewith I said I would benefit them.* And again, Of the Man after God's own Heart, the Man whose Seed it was

his

Pf. lxxxix.  
30, 31, 32.

his Purpose to make to endure for ever; he hath thus pronounced — *If his Children forsake my Law, and walk not in my Judgments; if they break my Statutes, and keep not my Commandments; I will visit (saith he) their Offences with the Rod, and their Sin with Scourges.* So that even these temporal Dispensations proceeded usually with a double Regard to the Conduct of the Fathers and the Children both. But the Children themselves had commonly the largest Share in deriving upon their own Heads, either the Judgments or Mercies of divine Providence; the Measure of which might however be increased, as the Concurrence of Guilt or Righteousness was more or less observable in them and their *Fore-fathers*. An Instance of this double Vengeance lighting at once upon the Children, for their own Offences and those of their Ancestors together, we find alluded to by our Saviour in his Address to the Pharisees — *fill ye up then (saith he) the Measure of your Fathers.* The *Fathers* he had accused before, as having slain the Prophets; and the *Sons* he



he arraigns upon their own Confession, Mat. xxiii. 32, 34, 35, 36.  
 which witnessed unto themselves that they  
 were the Children of them who had kill'd  
 the Prophets; wherefore, behold (saith he  
 to the Children) I send unto you Pro-  
 phets and wise Men, and Scribes; and some  
 of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some  
 of them shall ye scourge in the Synagogues,  
 and persecute them from City to City; that  
 upon you may come all the righteous Blood  
 shed upon the Earth, from the Blood of  
 righteous Abel unto the Blood of Zacharias  
 Son of Barathias, whom ye slew between  
 the Temple and the Altar. Verily I say un-  
 to you, All these Things shall come upon this  
 Generation. So terrible should be the  
 Storms of this Vengeance, that it should  
 look as if all the Crimes committed by  
 their Forefathers, as well as by them-  
 selves, were placed to their Account.

Therefore we pray to God in our ex-  
 cellent Liturgy, with great Propriety  
 and Fitness, that he would not remem-  
 ber our Offences, nor the Offences of our  
 Forefathers, nor so take Vengeance of our  
 Sins. In the Case here alluded to, there  
 was a Concurrence of like Guilt in the  
 Fathers and the Children both; and the

Punishment therefore fell the heavier upon the *Children*, tho' still within the Degree and Proportion which were due to their own Deservings. They might have averted however this Weight of Punishment, if they had not trod in the Footsteps of their wicked Ancestors, and provoked God to remember against them both their own and their Forefathers Offences. Then indeed all the Vials of his Wrath were poured out upon them, when no healing Circumstance could be pleaded to stop the Progress of it.

On the other Hand, when the *Israelites* kept the Precepts and the Statutes which God had appointed for them, the Faith of their Father *Abraham* entailed upon them the higher Proportion of Favour, and their Obedience met with the more gracious Acceptance for it; since even to *Thousands* is his *Mercy shewn*, (supposing them capable and qualified) in such as love him, and keep his *Commandments*. For he rejoiceth in Mercy, and extends it to *Thousands*, when he limits his Judgments to *the third and fourth Generation of such as hate him*.

Proceed

Proceed we therefore

II. To the next general Observation from the Text; *viz.* The Forbearance of God to a sinful People; which yet doth by no Means conclude for their Impunity.

The Iniquity of the *Amorites*, even then when God talked with *Abraham*, was *full* enough to deserve all the Vengeance which was meant to them; but yet so gracious and long-suffering was divine Providence, so willing to indulge them the Opportunities of Repentance and Reflexion, that they were yet to have a farther Trial, and *four Generations* were allotted to it. If in that Tract of Time, they should not remember themselves, nor turn unto the Lord who made them; their Case would be plainly desperate, and there could be no Hope nor Prospect of a Cure for it, other than the last and fatal Remedy of utter Excision.

But now in the Course of so many Years, and so many Successions from Father to Son, and to remoter Descen-



dents; many guilty Persons would be sure to go off the Stage, would dye perhaps full of Years, and Honours, and all which the World calls happy and desirable; yet these, it may be, contributed as much as any to fill up the Measure of their Country's Sins, and to lay in Fuel for the Vengeance of Heaven. So that in this Particular the *Forbearance* of God might seem a little to entrench upon his *Justice*, if there were not a Day to come wherein he would judge the World in perfect Righteousness, would reward every particular Person according to his Deeds, and clear up the Honour of each perplexed and intricate Dispensation. Here therefore, with a full Security that no Sin can escape him finally, he may indulge his Propensities to *Mercy*, without *Danger* to his *Justice*, or *Injury* to his *Laws*. Be it, that guilty Persons go down to the Grave in Peace, without any remarkable Shocks of Adversity, or any Incidents which carry a judicial Aspect with them; yet, alas! the Grave it self is only a Reprieve to them; their Punishment is suspended, but their Sin  
is

is yet upon Record against them uncanceled; the Day will still surely come, *when they who sleep in the Dust shall awake*, to the infinite Confusion of those who fell *asleep* in the Midst of unrepented Guilt. That this Day hath not made as yet any perceivable Approaches towards us, the Apostle hath imputed to the same *Long-suffering*; various Trials yet remain for us, in some or other of which we have a Chance for Repentance, and thereby for working out our Salvation. If none of these are improved to their intended Purpose, even this will add to the Measure of our Iniquities, and the *Goodness of God* which *leadeth* us not to *Repentance*, will certainly contribute to our *greater Damnation*. Tho' Sentence against an evil Work is not *speedily put in Execution*, yet it stands noted in the Book of God's Remembrance; the Decree is fixed for it, and if we come not within the Terms of Pardon, the Delay, whose original Intent was Mercy, will be found in the Result of Things to have *treasured up Wrath* for us *in the Day of Wrath*.

Particular Persons can have hence no Reason nor Encouragement for continuing in a State of Wickedness. The Delay of the general Judgment gives them no Security; *because* from present Appearances, no Man can certainly foretell what the Morrow may bring forth; *because* it was in the Nature of the Thing expedient, that this goodly Frame with its magnificent Furniture, should have all the Time which hath yet been allowed for its Continuance; and what more shall be allowed it no Man can determine; *because* the Purposes of Providence require fit Seasons for ripening the Events thereupon depending; *because* a *thousand Years* are as nothing in the Sight of God, whatsoever Room they may take up in the narrow Compass of an human Mind; and finally, *because* in some or other of the Trials designed for us, there may be Reason to hope, he shall somewhere find a willing and obedient People, who will hearken to his Voice, and pay due Honour to his Laws. In so many successive Generations of Men, and amidst so many Tests as various



rious Occasions must lay before them, it would be hard indeed, if *all* should go astray, if *none* should appear who would give Glory to God, and stand in awe of his Majesty and Power. What *one* Period of Time, *one* Method of Regimen *doth* not, *another* may produce; which is a Reason for trying *various* Conclusions, in *different* Seasons, for respiting the Dissolution of this mighty Fabric, and for giving its Inhabitants a farther Time, to see if at last they will come to their Understandings, and *seek after God*. Now whatever is a sufficient Reason to the *Justice of God*, for putting off the general Ruin and Destruction of Mankind, is certainly a sufficient Reason for *human Prudence*, not to conclude upon a *perpetual Impunity* from his *present Forbearance*. And after all, the Delay of the *general Wreck*, should it yet be postponed for a thousand Years farther, carries no Encouragement with it to any *particular* Sinner. For still the Day to him must be near approaching, which shall consign him irretrievably to the Reward of his Deeds,

Now if in the State of Separation he can make no Improvements, can procure no Change of the Sentence once pronounced upon him, or, which is all one, must abide the Sentence which the Law of God hath pronounced upon his Actions *here*, without any possible Mitigation from any Thing which he can do *hereafter*; if *there*, I say, he must wait for it from the Mouth of his holy Judge, and *no Device nor Wisdom*, no After-Reflections nor Tears of Sorrow, can change the Tenour of it; how fearful must his looking for of Judgment be? How uncomfortable must be the Time of that Imprisonment, which hath the Horrors of the second Death always before it? How inconsiderable will those Abatements of his Anguish be, which are founded only in the Delay of a *certain, foreseen*, and even *forefelt* Execution? When there are no Charms of Sense, no Amusements nor Entertainments of the World he was so fond of, either to divert the Pain of his raging Reflexions, or to soften the Terrors of the Lord, then breaking in with all their  
Force,

Force, *directly, immediately, irresistibly*, upon his *naked, unguarded, desponding* Spirit? Such a Delay of Execution, must be next to the Thing itself; and worse a great deal than any Execution which should put an End to his Misery, tho' with any the sharpest Degrees of Misery. Yet this Delay must be the utmost of the Sinner's Hope, from any conceivable Respite of the general Judgment. For as to the little Interval of his present Life, which hides these Things from his Eyes, and wraps them up in Clouds and Darknes, it deserves no Regard from him, being so infinitely uncertain, and nothing sure of it, but only that a very little Time must finish it.

The *Forbearance* of God is therefore, upon the whole, no Argument to any particular Person, but only for his most serious and speedy Repentance; that the Day of Grace may not pass over him unheeded, and unimproved; that the Goodness of God may not be defeated of its gracious Purpose, much less conclude in a quite contrary Result, nor instead  
of



of leading him to Repentance, harden him in his Sins, and so mislead him to his Ruine.

Nor is the Suspension of God's Judgments with regard to *Communities*, any just Encouragement to their Hope, that the *Bitterness* of them is finally *overpast*, or will never overtake them. The Coincidence of other Circumstances, which ripens the Seasons of Vengeance, is a Secret lock'd up in the Counsels of Providence. One Nation perhaps is to be exalted by the very same Means, which bring Reproach and Ruin upon another People. There are yet, it may be, some Tests remaining, which, when the People they are put to, do not abide nor stand them, leave that People yet more inexcusable, and fill up the Measure of their Iniquities to the Brim. Some Persons of distinguish'd Virtue, who shine as Lights in a dark Place, are first perchance to be removed into a Place of Safety before the destroying Angel is at Liberty to proceed with the Sword of Vengeance. Thus it fared with Lot, in his Escape to Zoar: *Haste thee, escape thither*

*thither, (said the Angel to him) for I cannot do any thing till thou come thither.* Yet these or any like Circumstances are such Reasons of God's Forbearance as most certainly conclude that his Vengeance will follow them, if not prevented by a public and solemn Repentance. He can, as he hath often done, remove his Candlestick from *one* Place, and fix it in *another*; can over-run the most enlightened Parts of the Earth with Ignorance and Barbarity, and *call a People who are not so, to be his People*; when they, who long have boasted of their *Peculium*, have rather sported with their Light, than made any sober or becoming Use of it. A *Mahomet* hath set his Banners in the most flourishing Churches of the *East* and *South*. We from a barbarous People have become a civilized; from the *Worship of dumb Idols* have been taught to *worship the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*; and from a Relapse into somewhat very like our original Ignorance, Barbarism and Idolatry have recovered, God be thanked, a greater Degree of  
Light

Light and of true Religion, than other Nations have been blessed with. Thus *we have heard with our Ears, and our Fathers have declar'd unto us the noble Works which our God hath done in their Days, and in the old Time before them;* for which, if we do not give Glory to his Name, he hath Instruments in Store, wherewith he can change the Current of his Blessings, and can commit *his Vineyard to other Husbandmen, who shall yield him the Fruits in their Season.* But here I am slipping unawares into my

III. *Third* and last Observation from the Text, viz. The Tendency of national Corruptions to bring down national Judgments upon any People.

When the *Iniquity of the Amorites was full*, then, and not 'till then, did Vengeance overtake them. Whilst they had amongst them any Number of Persons *serving God, and eschewing Evil;* such as *Melchizedec* and *Abimelech* are represented to have been, and such as, probably diverse other Persons were, in whom either their own Inclination,

or



or the Example of *Abraham* and his Family had kept up a becoming Sense of Piety and Virtue; *so long*, I say, their Judgment was suspended. *Ten righteous* Persons would have saved *Sodom*; but a general and spreading Wickedness usually portends Ruin to the Place which harbours it. When those good Men had quitted the Stage who lived amongst the *Amorites* in the Time of *Abraham*; and when the Patriarchal Religion was removed to *Egypt* with his Posterity, Vice and Irreligion gradually increased amongst them, 'till they sunk at length into a total Forgetfulness of God and of their Duty. As the People who supplanted them fell into their Vices, Instruments were raised up by Providence to punish and afflict them, to which the whole History of the *Jews*, from their Entrance upon the promised Land to their utter Extirpation, bears abundant Testimony. Nor is there, I believe, a Nation upon Earth, which doth not furnish many like Examples. There is a natural, and there is a judicial Tendency in Sin to bring Reproach  
and

and Scandal upon a People, to make them vile and contemptible in the Sight of their Neighbours, and an easy Prey to those who seek a Quarrel with them. Pride will cause them to overlook a Danger; Luxury will weaken the Hands which should guard against it; Faction will purchase at any Rate a Victory over its domestic Enemies; and the Neglect or Corruption of religious Duties, will forfeit their Interest in that Guardian Providence, which is their best Security against all the Perils wherewith they may be surrounded.

Whoever therefore contributes any thing to the Increase of national Corruptions, is so far an Enemy to the Place of his Habitation. Even personal and *private* Vices add to the Measure of *public* Iniquities, and help to fill it. So that the Practice hath as little in it of *Policy*, as it hath of *Piety*, which would disjoin the Kingdom of God from the Kingdoms of this World, or which seeks not the Righteousness of the *Former*, as the most probable Means to the *Latter's* Prosperity. For doubt-

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less the God who judgeth in the Earth, who so often distinguishes with his Favour the Virtues of *private* Life, will be much more careful to signalize *Communities*, where the Example will be so much more conspicuous and observable, will in all Likelihood carry more Weight with it, and will spread its Influence so much the wider and the farther. *Private* Persons he can elsewhere meet with, and be sure of; nor are his Dealings to them here of such mighty Moment, as to require any Nicety or Exactness in the Distribution of them. But the Exaltation or the Ruin of a whole Community is sure to attract the Notice of all who are near them, and to spread either the Joy or Terror of it, thro' the most distant Countries. Many are the Persons concerned in a national Interest; so that whatever befalls it, is more apparently subservient to the Purposes of Providence, in its Provisions for Virtue than any Events or Incidents of a *private* Nature. Wherefore, if in the Punishment of a general and spreading Corruption, some good Men



Men happen to suffer from the Company they are found in; or if, in the Recompence of national and public Virtues, some wicked Men partake of the common Felicity; these are Inconveniences of small Account in the Comparison, and covered in the much greater Advantage of a public Distinction between Good and Evil.

Our greatest Care is certainly due to the Issues of Futurity and to our Interest in that Life which, as yet, is *hid with Christ in God*. Yet somewhat the Community, whereof we are Members, claims from us, by no Means *inconsistent with* that superior View, but highly *conducive to it*. For let us be good Christians, and in Course we shall be good Commonwealth's-men. So that he who most truly loves his *Religion*, will be found truest Friend and Lover of his *Countrey*. But then we must not content ourselves to *talk or dispute* of the *one*, or of the *other*. The true Spirit of both is most conspicuous in *Practice*; is *pure, peaceable, gentle*, and more observable in *Deeds* than *Words*. But whosoever commits

Sin

Sin, makes, as far as in him lies, an Interest against his Countrey, and engages the God of Heaven to blast it. Whosoever neglects or affronts the Gospel of *Christ Jesus*; whosoever tramples upon his holy Institutions; whosoever would lay waste its Fences, or throw open its Enclosures, be his Pretences what they will, be his Professions never so loud and boisterous, for the Benefit of human Society, or for the particular Advantages of our Community, he is still an Enemy to the Commonwealth of our *Israel*, he is filling up the Measure of our national Iniquities, and in what Way soever God shall think fit to visit us, upon him we may justly charge some Portion of all our Sorrows. In a Word, evil Principles and evil Practices, whatever vilifies, corrupts, or betrays Religion, with whatever undermines, insults, or opposes the Interests of Virtue, should all be consider'd as leading to the same unfortunate Conclusion, as tending to derive the Judgments of God upon a sinful People, and to make them an Astonishment

nishment and Hissing to all Generations.

*May he, of his infinite Mercy, vouchsafe to remove far from us, both the Sin and Punishment. May he rejoice still over us to do us good; and make both our Church and Nation a Praise in the Earth. And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake.*



SERMON





## SERMON XI.



JAMES IV. 1.

*From whence come Wars and Fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your Lusts?*



THE Text is an Appeal to the Consciences and Convictions of the Persons it was addressed to, and carries with it all the Force of the most peremptory Assertion. The holy Writer knew full well they could not deny the Truth of it, notwithstanding

standing the Infamy of acknowledging it. Their Circumstances at that Time were such as made them feel it, and extorted from them a Confession of it. History informs us of the calamitous Condition the *Jews* were reduced to, by their intestine Jars, as well *before*, as *at* the Time wherein a foreign Enemy was ready to over-run them, and to say of them, what they soon after verify'd, *Let them be no more a People, and let the Name of Israel be no more in Remembrance.* Yet could not a Sense of the most imminent and pressing Dangers awaken in them a Care of their nearest Interests, or subdue those unruly *Lusts* which were pressing them on to their apparent Ruine.

The Observation is a very just one, which here is made upon their Conduct, and upon the Consequences wherewith it was attended; it is applicable to many Purposes of *public* and *private* Life, and hath pointed at the Rise of many Evils and Mischiefs which so commonly mix with *both*. With the Case of Communities, the Misfortunes to which they

they are liable, and the Causes which give Birth to them, I shall no farther meddle, than only by hinting this short Remark to you; That all the Miseries which Ambition, Avarice, and Resentment *can*, and *do* so often bring upon a People, are entirely founded in personal Faults, and in private Passions. So that a Regulation of these, by a steady Adherence to the Rules of Religion, would strike at the Root of many national Calamities; and in *this* Way *Righteousness* would *exalt a Nation*, whilst *Sin* is ever *a Reproach* to it. Prov. xiv. 34.

But we have the less Need to dwell upon this Consideration; because if Men can be persuaded to govern those Affections, which disconcert them in their *personal* and *private* Capacities, their *politic* and *public* cannot often nor deeply suffer from them. A good *Christian* must and will be a good *Commonwealth's-man*. The Man, who, in our Author's Language, is *pure and peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy*, cannot but make the Place he

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lives



James iii.  
16.

lives in, the Community he belongs to, the better for his Neighbourhood, and for his Relation to it. As on the other Hand, an envious, contentious Disposition, a griping and narrow Spirit, Pride and Wrath, with every unfociable, unfriendly Temper of Mind, must be public Nufances, and common Mischiefs. For the same holy Writer hath well observed to us, that, *where Envyng and Strife is, there is Confusion, and every evil Work.* So then, if private Life could universally be brought within fit Regulations, the *public* Interest would in Course be served by it; as the greatest Evils which besal the *one*, are usually chargeable upon Want of Care and Conduct in the *other*.

But leaving the *public* Interest in the Hands where Providence hath so happily lodged it; I mean henceforwards to consider the Mischiefs which flow into *private* Life, from undisciplin'd Affections, and to charge all our Complaints, (or the forest Aggravations of them) upon our *Lusts*.

Here

Here then it will be proper to survey Mankind in these several Postures.

I. In the ordinary Course of their common Pursuits.

II. In their several Dealings and Intercourses with one another.

III. In their personal Capacities; And

IV. In their Dependence upon the God who made them.

And we shall observe, I doubt not, under each of these Particulars, that our general Assertion hath strong Reasons support it.

I. *First* then, if we survey Mankind in the ordinary Course of their common Pursuits, we shall find that the greatest Mischiefs of human Life are chargeable upon our own Mismanagement under the Article of *Desire*. For from what other Fountain can we so fitly derive those anxious Fears and corroding Cares, which break in upon our Enjoyment of the Good before us, with a Set of dark and formidable Apprehensions, that it will not long continue with us, or that

we shall miscarry in the Issues which are yet depending, or that Life will not hold out with us to the End of our Expectations, or that our leading Wishes will, in some Way or other, be frustrated and defeated?

Let all this be struck out of the Catalogue of our Complaints, and, I'm sure, the Bulk and Number of them will be much abated. For we really *double* our own Misfortunes by *ante-dating* them; by sending out our Imaginations to meet them, as it were, half-way, we engage in their Company before we need to do; nay, perhaps, when our Fears are most eager to fetch them into us, they are never in reality meant to come up with us.

Now it is most clearly and evidently the Impatience of *Desire*, which makes all the Mischief we can here complain of. Our Hearts are earnestly devoted to the Point in Question, and we cannot endure the Suspence and Uncertainty of a darling Project. Hence all our Passions conspire in their several Ways to put our Souls into a Ferment, and to quicken



quicken the Sluggishness of our active Powers, for solliciting, endeavouring, contriving, and labouring the Success of it. *Hope* often brings us within near View of it, makes us e'en ready to burst with Expectation, and leaves us then to lament our Disappointment, in Leanness and Sorrow proportionable to the Joy conceiv'd upon our Prospect. But if our Measures seem ripening into Success, and only want a finishing Hand to be set to them in order to obtain it, it will not be easy then to stop the *Hand*, which the *Heart* hath set at work, whatever may prove the Consequences of so employing it. These will not be thought of, or not regarded, where the Bent of the Soul stands much disposed to close with the Occasion, and to embrace an inviting Offer with any Hazard, and at all Adventures.

The final Result is in all these Cases consider'd as remote and distant, whilst the Advantage or the Pleasure is at hand and present. And any Shew of a Possibility to escape the Mischief, wherewith an instant View may *hereafter* threaten us,

us, will pass with us for a Demonstration, that we need not value such a remote, such an uncertain, such a merely conjectural and contingent Evil. Thus we entangle our selves in a Maze of Difficulties, from which no After-Measures of Wisdom or Prudence can ever, it may be, disengage us.

When the Mind is over-bent by too strong a Byass towards any worldly Good, the Issue indeed is likely to be untoward, whatever turn it takes. In pushing for Success, you will be apt to over-look many Things as considerable, as the Case depending *can* be. And Success it self will not compensate for the Mischiefs arising from such Neglect. In labouring your Point, perhaps more Pains are taken than Enjoyment it self can answer, which is therefore over purchased, and the Surplus so given for it goes all to the Account of Loss and Damage. It may be, that after much Perplexity and Trouble in looking after it, you finally miscarry; and when you have *eaten the Bread of Carefulness* and Sorrow, you find it all *but Labour lost*.  
Or

Or else, after a great deal of Anxiety and Struggle, many Vicissitudes of Fortune, and diverse cross Accidents, which have cast you back in your Measures, you come up with your Point, when Life is upon the Lee, and your Glass is almost run out. Here then the Excursions of your Desire have made a wretched Bargain for you; have led you all your Days thro' the Mire and Drudgery of the World, thro' a tempestuous and stormy Season, only to give you a Moment's Calm and Sun-shine, just to set you upon your Legs in a passable and pleasant Road, and then immediately to hurry you away from it, and to close your Eyes in perpetual Darkness. Thus you become the Bubble of your own Passions; and by following an improper Scent of Happiness, you are led into a vain *Shadow*, which cheats you of the *Substance*, and loses you in a Wilderness of endless Fancies.

The Man of Avarice and Ambition, as well as the gay Voluptuary, may each of them charge to his own Account the several Infelicities under which



which he labours. If the one cannot get enough, the other not be great enough, the third not fill his Appetite, or by over-charging surfeits it; the original Cause of the several Mischiefs which can be hence complain'd of, is clearly founded in the Excess and Intemperance of their respective Passions. Would each of them labour to regulate the Exorbitance of their several Demands, the Reason of their Complaints, must cease, or be much abated. Would they labour as much to *regulate*, as they do to *answer* their infinite Cravings, the Success of their Endeavours would be more certain, as well as more satisfactory; and yet upon the Foot of such a Procedure, a competent Provision were as likely to be made for their respective Claims. For I know not how, nor whence it comes to pass, but so it often falls out, that the Appetite and Ardor wherewith Men push their several Pretensions, lead them often into Mischiefs which might have been avoided, and yet with the main Point as well secured to them by a smoother Course, and by  
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a cooler Conduct: Whether it be the Providence of *God*, which interposes to check such over-heated Efforts; or whether amidst the several Interferings in the Bustle and Crowd of Life, there be a Combination of *Men* to stop *his* Passage, who distinguishes himself by a seeming Resolution to *force* it thro' all Adventures; the Result is often observed to be, what it hath here been represented. So true, is the wise Man's Remark in manifold Examples; *I returned*, (saith Eccles. ix. 11. he) *and saw under the Sun, that the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, neither yet Bread to the Wise, nor yet Riches to Men of Understanding, nor yet Favour to Men of Skill; but Time and Chance happeneth to them all.* This, however, is no Reason for laying aside the Use of *Means*; but it is a Reason for not depending upon too *much* from them, for resigning the Success of them, and for pushing them with Moderation. This will at once consult the Ease and Innocence of Life; will prevent the Occasions of much Disquiet and of Guilt;

Guilt; and yet will bid as fair for the Success of any commendable Pursuit, as more anxious Desire, more tormenting Care, and more consuming Labour. If we proceed from this to our

II. *Second* Consideration, and survey Mankind in their several Dealings and Intercourses with one another; *there* also we shall find the same *Root of Bitterness* spreading its fatal Branches thro' Life, and sowering its Comforts with a Mixture of various Passions. Self-Love is here the common Point they all concenter in; which tho', like the rest, in its Nature innocent and commendable, yet is apt to exceed the Limitations design'd for it, and by grasping at too much, to diminish the little good it might otherwise obtain for us.

Whatever be the Mischiefs which Contention and Strife give Birth to, whatever Damp can be cast upon our Happiness, and whatever Sting can be added to our Misfortunes, by Emulation and Wrath, Variance and Discord, or by the unkind and unfriendly Disposition,



sitions of Hatred, Malice, and Envy, are all of them truly and justly chargeable to the Account of our Misconduct under this single Article. We *over-rate* our own Pretensions, and *undervalue* the Claims of others: Who, 'tis likely, are even with us in the Error of their Calculate; and miscompute as much in theirs, as we can do in our own Favour. This now must produce a terrible Misreckoning at the Foot of the Account; and a great Gap will be left between People, who pull with all their Might two contrary Ways, whilst neither considers the Consequence of over-straining.

This Gap will soon be filled up with the forementioned Passions, and thus, instead of being blessed with Peace and Harmony, with all the good-natur'd Offices of Gentleness, Meekness, and mutual Love; the main Scenes of Life are disorder'd by a perpetual Scramble, wherein the several Actors, without any uniform Design or Concert for the common Good, do only stand in one another's Way, carry on their separate Views,

Views, and in the Crowd and Bustle of their interfering Measures, each complains of his Neighbour, who retorts the Charge, and loads it with new Reproaches.

Thus Self-love, by moving too fast and too precipitantly, defeats its own Purpose, and misses its general Aim of Happiness, by fixing too intensely upon some particular Point of it, which others perhaps have fixed upon as well as we, and so we cannot adjust the State of our respective Pretensions. Hence we find ourselves engaged insensibly in Rencounters and mutual Expostulations; in ill Wishes and ill Offices towards each other. This is the Fuel which feeds and pampers the whole Tribe of unso- ciable Affections; and these ('tis too well known) can make the *sweetest* Waters *bitter*, can destroy the Blessings of Peace and good Neighbourhood, and make each Man a Plague and Torment to himself, and to all about him.

It is not hard to trace the *Cause* of the several Mischiefs which flow into human Life, thro' diverse *Channels*, when they

they have one Fountain-head. But then it is not so easy to stop their *Course*, nor to assign a Cure for them.

Would reasonable Creatures agree in living up to their proper Character; and in uniting together upon the Foot of a common Interest, much would be gained by it towards this desirable End. For then, as no Man would be injurious to another, no Man would so far over-strain his own Pretensions, as to complain of Injury where he really had none. As each would wish well to his Neighbour, and receive in Return good Wishes from him; all the pernicious Effects of Hated and Ill-will, of Anger, Malice, and Envy, must cease in Course. As all would *strive in Honour to prefer one another*, the only Rivalship would be, who should be most courteous, obliging and condescending. This was the State for which God designed us, and still means it for us, if we do not disqualify ourselves for his gracious Purpose, by contracting Dispositions, repugnant to it. That we do not now en-



joy the full Effects of his merciful Design concerning us, and dwell in a Paradise of Peace and Love, is no Way chargeable to the original Scheme of Divine Providence; but to the Misgovernment and Misconduct of human Passions. For even this World of Trouble and of wild Confusion would not appear in such an unamiable and ghastly Form, if the Reason which God hath given us were exerted in a proper Manner, upon the Occasions and Incidents we encounter in it. So that we owe to ourselves, or to Men like ourselves, most of the Disorders in Life which make it miserable; whereas an uniform Adherence to the Rule of Duty which God hath appointed for us, would produce a Change in it much to our Advantage.

But to this happy Consequence, the Concurrence of all is necessary, which is not likely to be gain'd to it, tho' it be manifestly a *common* Interest. For whilst some are in View of obtaining more a good deal than a fair Proportion in this common Interest, they will

be ever pushing hard to come at it, and will find, or fancy in themselves sufficient Merit to justify even their wildest Claims. And what then shall any single Person do, or how shall he behave who would live well with the World, and preserve the Peace of it; but meets with many in the World, who will not live well with *him*, nor cultivate the like Dispositions, towards Neighbourhood and Humanity?

The Answer to this Enquiry will lead us to our

III. *Third Particular*, from considering Men in their several Dealings and Intercourses with one another, to view them in their *personal Capacities*, and thence to examine, whether, if the *Social Virtues* will not furnish us with a Remedy for this Complaint, the *Personal* will not help in it. They doubtless will in a great Measure *relieve* and *paliate*, if they cannot *cure* it.

Let the Lessons of Modesty, Meekness, and Patience be well imbibed; and let it then be seen whether the Reason

of the Complaint will not be much abated. The World, we'll say, is injurious and unfriendly to us. It may be so; nor are the Effects of Ignorance and Perverseness to be much wonder'd at. But *Modesty* perhaps would induce us to charge a *little* of this ill Treatment upon our own Misconduct: *Meekness* would strike off a little more from it; because it would cover some *Part* of it, and not spy out the *whole* in its fullest Dimensions. *Patience* would defend us against the Sting of Provocation, and prevent its entering us with any Depth. And with all these Abatements, we might find a good Deal of Ease and of Support, under a Sense, a just Sense, of the most grievous Injuries. We should then be less apt to judge Retaliation the fittest Method of dealing with them, and consequently, should be more free from the Mischiefs which will always follow upon drawing the Saw of reciprocal Contention. For if in the first Instance the Injury was so hardly born with, how shall we be able to bear it in a second? Now we may ordinarily assure ourselves, that



that a Return to the first will produce a second; since he who was unjust enough to be the Aggressor, will make no Conscience of continuing and repeating his Injustice, if we favour him with the Plea of what may be called a Provocation.

I am speaking now of such Injustice, as the Magistrate cannot vindicate. And Instances enough there are of such Injustice to try our Patience, and our Prudence too; as indeed our *Patience* under them is our truest *Prudence*; and our Contempt of them, perhaps the most *effectual*, but *certainly* the *safest*, indeed the *only innocent* Revenge.

From a different Conduct, the Consequences are so terrible, and so destructive to the real Interests of human Society, that every *orderly* Member of it, who means the World should not be the worse for him, will avoid with all Diligence the one and the other. If he gains not the Point in View with him, when he hath pursued it within the Rules of Decency and Justice; it will be more for his Ease and Interest to sit

down content with his Disappointment than to fester his Wound by furious Agitations, and unmanly Discomposures. If he receives an Injury wherein he must either be his own Avenger, or have none in present; he must needs be sensible, how unfit it is that he should compute for himself the Measure of his Deservings, or the *Quantum* of a just Reparation, where *Self* is interested; and withal he may consider, that in seeking Satisfaction for his first ill Treatment he will probably find it repeated to him in a second Example: So that except he could crush his *Adversary* (from which, if it were in his Power, Compassion and Greatness of Soul should restrain him) it were always better to *agree* with him, to keep at least out of his *Way*, and to have as little as possible to do with him. But to draw the Quarrel into Length, and to reciprocate ill Offices, as fast and as often as Opportunities will give Leave, is a View so unnatural, a Practice so displeasing to God, so fatal to our own, and to the common Peace of the Society in which his Providence

vidence hath fixed us, that no Man will engage in it, who hath any Sense of his *Duty* to the *one*, or of his *Interest* in the *other*.

We have now observed in several Instances which have here been pointed to, how much the Regulation of our leading Passions would contribute to the Ornament and Comfort of human Life; what a large Proportion of our Complaints would be struck off by it; how well and easily it would qualify us to bear the Suspence and Uncertainty of our several Pursuits; how it would prevent the ill Consequences of those mutual Interferings and Rencounters, which engage us in Broils and Contentions with one another; how by a soft Reception of Injuries it would teach us to weaken the Force, and to blunt the Edge of them; and how by Content and Patience, to weather the Storms of Affliction and Disappointment.

For it is indeed very certain, that the several Mischiefs which most infest us, have their Sting sharpened for them by our Passions; that they could hurt us



very little, if they had not a Party within our own Bosom and Bowels to assist in their Attacks upon us; upon the whole, that most of our *Complaints* are chargeable upon our *Follies*.

But is it then within the Power of Reason, Philosophy, or Religion, to exempt a Man from the ordinary Condition of human Life, and quite to free him from the Troubles of it? Are there not manifold and various Evils to be named in it, which as no Degree of Prudence could have prevented, so no Measures of Patience can utterly subdue the Sense of them? Doth not the Providence of God mean often to refine the Dross of his faithful Servants, in the Furnace of Affliction, which could not answer (it may be thought) the Design of Heaven, if there were no Sense, no Feeling of it?

The Answer to these Queries will lead us to our

IV. *Fourth* and last Consideration, viz. To take our View of Mankind, as in a State

State of Dependence upon the God who made them.

Here every querulous Passion would be dumb and dormant, if our *Reason* or *Religion* were suffered to have its proper, or indeed almost any Influence. For,

Whatever the Misfortunes of Life may be, when once we are sensible that they are all the Dispensations of a wise and gracious Providence, there can be no more Room for Complaint and Murmur, than there can be in any painful Methods of Medicine, intended to heal and cure us. It is not in either Case expected, that we should not *feel* the *Pain*; tho' the more we rage and fret at it, the more *painful* it will be, and the less *effectual*. Our *Duty* in this, as generally in other Cases, is our apparent *Interest*; and our Submission is at once a *Lenitive*, which will assuage our Grief, and the *express Proof* of our Resignation to the Will of Heaven. And then the Instruments which shall be used in these Methods of chastising us, will encounter less of our Resentment, when it is consider'd

consider'd, to *what* and to *whose* wife Purposes they are severally subservient.

A Dog will bite indeed a Stone which is thrown at him, 'till he breaks his Teeth with it. But a *reasonable Creature* will behave in another Manner; and a *Christian* will exert and will exemplify the Power of his Religion, upon such Occasions; he will consider, and say, as his Saviour did to *Pilate* upon a like Exigence, *Thou couldest have no Power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.* This indeed doth no way excuse the Instruments, where they are free Agents in the Mischief; but then it consigns them to their proper Judge in *Heaven*, when there is none upon *Earth* to reach them; and may very fitly silence in the Interim, the over-hasty Demands of a vindictive Spirit.

In fine, Religion is manifestly intended for our Ease and Happiness, and a Sense of our Dependence upon its holy Author hath a notorious Tendency to brighten the Enjoyments, and to soften the Infelicities of our present State. All the Tumults and Disorders, which pass  
within



within our own Breasts, and either *sour the Comforts*, or *enrage the Misfortunes* of Life, might find from this one Resource either a *Lenitive* or a *Cure*.

Its farther Prospects enter not with strict Propriety into our present Argument. But if it takes out the Sting from those Casualties and Misadventures which *here* befall us; if it leaves that Happiness, which will always arise from the Government of our several Passions, pretty much within our Power; and gives us besides fair Chances for a competent Share in the other Blessings of this World; the Infidel himself cannot doubt, but that its Hope from another doth infinitely exceed the Sinner's. Hereafter there can be no Comparison, and even *here*, upon an impartial Estimate, there can be little Room for it.

*God of his infinite Mercy grant, that we may see and follow the Things which belong to our Peace before they be hid from our Eyes.*

*To which End, let us humbly beseech him, who alone can order the unruly Wills*  
*and*

## SERMON XI.

and Affections of sinful Men, to grant  
unto his People, that they may love  
the Thing which he commandeth, and  
desire that which he doth promise;  
That so among the sundry and mani-  
fold Changes of the World, our Hearts  
may surely there be fixed, where true  
Joys are to be found, thro' Jesus  
Christ our Lord.



SERMON

upon observing the Prosperity which  
sometimes attends the Wicked;



and substantial Happiness; and when  
they find it not the Portion of their own  
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## S E R M O N XII.

Psalm lxxiii. 12, 13.

*Behold these are the Ungodly, who  
prosper in the World, they in-  
crease in Riches;*

*Verily I have cleansed my Heart  
in vain, and washed my Hands  
in Innocency.*



THE Psalm represents to us  
in a very lively Manner  
the repining, discontented  
Thoughts, which even good  
Men are apt to harbour in their Breasts,  
upon



upon observing the Prosperity which sometimes attends the Wicked; the Discouragements it is apt to give them, and the hasty Reasonings which they frequently form upon it. They judge all along upon mere Appearances; mistake a little Blaze and Figure, for real and substantial Happiness; and when they find it not the Portion of their own Lot, they run into disadvantageous Conclusions upon the Providence of God, as if he did not enough distinguish his faithful Servants by his favourable Dealings towards them. Yet a truly good Man will soon recover out of the Surprise into which these Observations may on the sudden hurry him; and will look round the Case before he finally pronounces of it. When he goes *into the Sanctuary of God*, and there considers the Methods of his Government, he will find, that neither the Felicity of the Wicked, nor the Destitution of the Righteous, are Cases so sure in Fact, nor so frequently to be met with, as he was apt to imagine; that Complaints of this Kind are often ill-founded, and  
made

made upon erroneous Estimates; that those Appearances of Happiness which mislead him in his Calculations, are not always what they *seem* to be, do not perform what they promise, nor answer up to Expectation. Here is then an Error at setting out; his first Principle is wrong, and so must therefore be all the Inferences he draws from it. Which accordingly shall be my

I. *First Remark* upon this Way of Reasoning, that its very Foundation is often faulty, and the Prosperity of the Ungodly, which the good Man is grieved at seeing, is a mere *Deceptio Visus*, an Illusion of Fancy, when no such Thing as Happiness doth really attend them. But,

II. *Secondly*, Upon a Supposal, that, in some Instances at least, his Observation may be right and just, that the good Things of Life are now and then in the Sinner's Possession; I shall then endeavour to give you some Account of this Matter, and to clear the Providence of God

God from all Reproach and Misconstruction.

So then, if, in that Way of Reasoning which the Text and Context have pointed to us, with a View of cautioning us against it; if, I say, the Premises are often in Point of Fact mistaken, and the Conclusion grafted upon them be always erroneous; the whole Argument must needs be throughout fallacious; the Objection hence started against Providence, must be weak and frivolous; any Despondencies the good Man may sink into from it must be imputed to his *Frailty*; as any Encouragements which the Sinner may derive from it, must be charged upon his *Presumption*. But,

I. *First*, I begin with observing, that the very Foundation of this Reasoning is often Faulty, and the *Prosperity* of the *ungodly*, which the good Man is grieved at seeing, is a mere *Deceptio Visus*, an Illusion of Fancy, when no such thing as Happiness doth really attend them.

I might here premise, that there is frequently a two-fold Error committed in



in this Estimate, through too great a Proneness in Men of severe and retired Thoughts to censure the most innocent and allowable Liberties of Life, and to pronounce the Persons ungodly who indulge them. This Censure regulated by charitable and sober Measures would strike perhaps a round Number out of the Account, from which the Calculations are made of the *Wicked* in great Prosperity; since the Persons thus wicked in the Sight of Men, are, it may be, in the Judgment of God, as upright and harmless as their unfriendly Censors. But when these are struck out of the Estimate, tho' the Number hence may be a good deal abated; yet Instances will still be left which cannot be disputed, of notorious Sinners, who *prosper in the World*, who *increase in Riches*, and in the several Ingredients which go into the Composition of worldly Happiness. Yet then, even here, where the *Character* of the *Person* cannot be questioned, the Quality of his Condition is often mistaken; for a Man at last may be very unhappy amidst all the Libe-

ralities and Indulgences wherewith Fortune can favour him. No Man knows what passes within the Retirements of another's Breast; the anxious Fears, the corroding Cares, the gloomy Presages, the stinging Reflexions, the sad Apprehensions of various Sorts, which may lash and wound and mortify him in the deep Silence of the Night, or in the secret Chambers of his Heart. The Part in his Circumstances which is gay and splendid attracts and dazzles the Eye of a transient Spectator; who looks not beyond fine Appearances, and guesses that all is as well *within*, as it *seems* to be *without*; where yet perhaps there is a Wound unobserved by others, which preys upon the Peace and Quiet of his Soul, and leaves all his other Comforts tasteless and jejune to him.

The whole Extent and Compass of any Man's Affairs, the Impressions they make upon him, and the different Sentiments of Joy or Sorrow wherewith he entertains them, are generally confined to his own personal Knowledge and Perception of them; as it is indeed impossible

ble they should be thoroughly *known*, where they are not *felt*. Yet upon Circumstances thus *unknown* to all but himself the *pretise Measures of his Felicity* do at last depend. Let him then be surrounded to any Degree conceivable, with outward Advantages; yet if there be a Thorn in any of them unseen by the World, but painful to his own Sense and Feeling, the rest will but little avail to his real Happiness. The rest, it may be, seem to those who have them not, to contain in them very many Ingredients of what the World calls Happiness; but to those who *have* them, who are *accustomed* to them, and who are fully acquainted with the utmost Amount of them, they convey no more of real Satisfaction, than what is enjoyed by such as have them not, from the different Advantages which those others stand possessed of.

The Emptiness of worldly Good, and its utter Insufficiency to answer the endless Cravings of our several Desires, betray themselves in nothing more, than in that general Imagination which seems



to haunt all Orders of Men amongst us, that if they *had* somewhat which they *have* not, somewhat which they see others have, and fancy themselves to want, all would be well and easy with them; when yet those others are not more easy than themselves, but are teased with the same incurable Imagination, the same Leanness of Soul, the same Dissatisfaction for want of somewhat which they have not, or for some unpleasing Circumstance in what they *have*, which spoils perhaps their Relish of all the Entertainment they can find in Life.

I speak not here of those visible and glaring Misfortunes, which are often observed to mix with, and to checquer the Felicities of a State, otherwise prosperous and flourishing: Since these would cross upon our present Supposition, which puts the Case of wicked Men, *appearing* to abound in all the Comforts of Life; to *come into no Misfortune like other Folk*, nor to be *plagued like other Men*. But what I would say is this, that *Appearances* here, as well as in

in other Instances differ widely from *Realities* ; and a great deal may be felt by the unhappy Patient, where a By-stander, tho' a Domestick, it may be, and a Friend, perceives no Ailment, no Cause of Complaint. This is a common Case, which stands verified by Experience in manifold Examples. Now there is more Reason to expect, that this should be the Lot of the *Wicked*, even when *Appearances* seem most to favour them, than of any Persons in the World besides them.

The *Providence* of God renders it ordinarily a very just and fit Expectation, that the bright Side of their Fortune should have a *dark* one to shade it; lest they should proceed in their presumptuous Practice without any Remembrance, that *there is a God, who judgeth in the Earth*. So that there is room enough to *suppose*, where we cannot see it, that they carry about with them a Scourge and an Avenger.

And from the *Reason of Things*, it is more credible of *them*, than of any other Persons, (whatever their outward Con-

ition may seem to be) that it is not *really* so smooth and flourishing as *Appearances* represent it.

For the common Issues of Life are uncontested Evidences of its great Uncertainty. So that they must go hence, they are sure, in a very little Time, and leave whatever can be thought their Happiness behind them. And they must go hence into a State for which the Case as put supposes them to have made no Manner of Provision, with all the conceivable Degrees of *Probability*, that they are to live for ever in it, and with an utter *Impossibility* of securing themselves against a Danger of this vast Importance: The Sense of which were alone enough to denominate their Condition exceedingly unhappy; with every other Circumstance of Life in their Favour. Now if this Apprehension doth no Way affect them: yet if there be infinite Reason why it should affect them; if the Enjoyment they take in the Felicities of Fortune can no way be accounted for, but by supposing them destitute of all

good



good Sense and Forecast\*; if a Man may be truly pronounced unhappy with extreme, (tho' unseen) Misery at his Elbow, just ready to befall and crush him; this, I think, is so clearly the Case of the Ungodly, that no good Man should envy them the Accommodations of their Passage, howsoever gawdy or sumptuous, when the Way they are taking leads them to *Destruction*, and must for ever banish them *from the Presence of the Lord, and from the Glory of his Power*.

We suppose the Sense of all this to be at present not very pungent nor uneasy to them; since, if it were so, they might and would arm against it. But still an Extremity of Danger, whether perceived or not, represents a Man's Affairs as in a very untoward Posture, and indeed as the worse a great deal for that Want of Apprehension which should apprize him of it, and solicit his Endeavours to guard against it.

Now to render the Prosperity of the Wicked any just Objection against Pro-

\* Εὰν μὲν τινὰ λίαν ποιήτης ἄφοβον, ὥς τε μηδὲ τὸ Θεοῦ φοβήσασθαι, ὅτε ἀνδρείῳ, ἀλλὰ μανόμενῳ ἔσται. Aristot.

vidence, it should be proved in their Favour, not only that they have this or that Accommodation in Life, which might go a good Way towards the Happiness of some other Persons; but that upon the whole of their Case, upon a full Survey of it in all its Circumstances, respecting as well their probable *Prospects*, as their present *Enjoyments*, it should be proved, I say, that upon *such* a View of their Condition it may be fairly entitled happy\*; which for the Reasons given I am sure it can never be,

To account however for those Appearances of Felicity, which the Sinner, in some Instances is found possessed of, you will give me Leave to enter upon a fuller Discussion of this Matter under my

II. *Second* General, and to lay before you diverse Considerations, which may clear the Providence of God from all Reproach and Misconstruction in it.

I. *First* then, I desire it may be consider'd as a View very fit and reasonable, that some Room should be left for the

\* Τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς ἡ ἐνέργεια, ἐνδυμνία. Aristot.

Opera-

Operations of *Faith*, for the *Trials of Virtue*, and for *Liberty of Action*; all which Ends would be defeated, if the Punishment of Sin did in every Instance immediately attend it. There could be no Proof of our *Faith*, if the invisible World were naked and open to us, or (which were in Effect the same Thing) if the Hand of divine Vengeance should always appear stretch'd out for the *present* Correction of each Misdeed. *Seeing*, in this Case, would supersede *Believing*; whereas the Blessing of our Lord is entailed most emphatically upon those *who have not seen, and yet have believed.* Joh. xx. 19.

The Reason of the Preference seems to be this; that no Thanks can with any Colour be claimed by the Man who gives into a Persuasion, when it is impossible to avoid it; whereas a Man, who preserves his Mind in a State of Openness and Readiness for the Reception of important Truths, supported, we suppose, by sufficient Evidence, yet clogged with some Difficulties, and encounter'd by various Passions, (this Man I say) acts up to his proper Character,  
and



and by making due Proof of his reasonable Nature, stands fairly entitled to the Praise and Recompence of so wise a Conduct. It is here apparent, that any Methods of Dealing with us, which should turn the Evidence of *Faith* into the Evidence of *Sight* would leave no Room for the Operations of the *former*; and so that Test of our Reason would entirely be lost and sunk, which consists in the Wisdom of believing upon fit and rational Motives of Persuasion.

The same, a good deal, is the Case of *Virtue*; which would have as little *Trial* in *this* World, as it is designed to have in the *next*, if the Scourge hung always over us, ready to lash us for each Example of our Departure from it.

The most adventurous Sinner would certainly be daunted, and deterred from his presumptuous Practice by various Regards of present Inconvenience, were he always sure of encountring such Inconvenience, were it confessedly and constantly entailed upon his Sin without any one Exception. And yet perhaps his Love and Liking to his Sin

Sin would still in that Case continue, and would burn the more ardently *within*, for being *outwardly* restrained. So that the Views of Providence, which are intended to meliorate and sanctify our Nature, would to no Degree be answer'd by such Methods of Government, as should only affect our *exterior* Department, without reaching the Fountains of Action, or exemplifying the Truth of our *inner Parts*.

That Firmness of our Minds, which enables us to make a Stand against *present* Impressions, in Hope of a *future* Recompence, is the just and proper Commendation of Virtue; which would lose the Applauses to which it stands hence entitled, if, instead of *Hopes* and *Fears*, whose respective Objects are *unseen* and *distant*, it were governed by *visible* and *present* Regards of *Punishment* or *Reward*.

Nor would that *Liberty of Action*, which enters essentially into the Character of Virtue, be preserved entire to it, if *Sin* and *Punishment* did immediately and inseparably attend each other.

Some

Some Fears there manifestly are which will over-bear at once our Freedom and our Reason, which will take from us the Possession of our selves, and leave us not Masters of our own Conduct. The *Civil Law* therefore very wisely allows a Terror which is sufficient to out-brave a Man of Constancy and Courage, *Metus qui cadere in constantem virum possit*, allows, I say, such a Terror to pass in Excuse of any Misadventure flowing from it. Upon the same Reason and Equity, a Man loses his Title to the Praise and Recompence of any *Virtue*, into which he is frightened by a Terror of equal Magnitude. So that if he resists a Temptation because he sees immediate and certain Vengeance entailed upon a *Compliance* with it, he is not properly Master of his Conduct in that Particular, he hath no Time to deliberate; and his Forbearance proves no more of his Wisdom or Virtue, than what we ascribe to a Man, when we only say of him, that he is not directly mad; as he manifestly would be, should he rush upon immediate and apparent  
Ruin.



Ruin. Thus far then we may discern it to be fit and reasonable, that some Distance and some Respite should be interposed between the *Punishment* and the *Sin*; and consequently that some Appearances of worldly Happiness should be found now and then in the Sinner's Possession. For,

2. *Secondly*, I desire it may be observed, that without such an Interposal from the Hand of Providence, as, for the Reasons just given, would be improper and inconvenient; the Sinner must and *will* have his Chances in the Scramble of Life, must and will secure to himself more (it may be) than a *common* Share in the Felicities of Fortune. He lays out, 'tis likely, all the Powers of his Mind in the Pursuit of them, employs all his Skill and all his Diligence in his Endeavours to obtain them; is quick in espying his Advantage, and as ready to push it; suffers himself to be check'd by no Restraints of Honour or Justice, of Religion or Virtue. Suppose him now with all this Industry and Application, to have mixed a due  
Proportion

Luke xvi.  
8.

Dan. iv.  
17.

Ecclef. ix.  
11.

Prov. xvi.  
33.

Proportion of human Prudence; he will then have all the Likelihood of Things to favour his Pretensions; and, as he is represented *wiser in his Generation than the Children of Light*, his Successes must be more frequent than they are observable, if the *most High* did not rule in the Kingdom of Men, who disposeth not always the Race to the swift, nor the Battle to the strong, neither yet Bread to the wise, nor yet Riches to Men of Understanding, nor yet Favour to Men of Skill; but when the Lot is thrown into the Lap, reserves to himself the whole Disposal thereof: I say, did not the invisible Checks of Providence often cross upon the Designs and Endeavours of the Wicked, they are frequently so laid and concerted, that they could not well miss their Aim. For unfit, by the way, as it is, that these Interposals should be too *glaring* or *constant*, it is no less unfit that they should be wholly *wanting*. But now by that wise and becoming Temper which is actually observed in the Order of God's Government, our Faith and our Virtue, have their Exercise

ercise and Trial; Room is hence left for the *Use* of human Prudence without an absolute *Reliance* on it; the Sinner may know and may reflect, that the *Times and Seasons, and the Bounds of his Habitation* are in the Hands of a superior Power; yet still this Remembrance is not so forced upon him, but that if he hath much a Mind to it he may drop it, he hath his Liberty, and may govern his Persuasions and his Actions by other Measures. Virtue hath rational Inducements and fit Encouragements to back it; but compulsory Terrors and Methods of Violence, as inconsistent with its Genius and Character, are not apply'd to it. The Wicked therefore are sometimes left to the natural Results of their *own* Genius and Application; and sometimes advanced to a Station of Eminence; and only that their Ruin may be the more conspicuous by their Fall from it. Surely (saith our holy Psalmist in the Context) *thou didst set them in slippery Places, thou castedst them down into Destruction. How are they brought into Desolation! they are utterly*

Psalm. lxxiii.  
18, 19, 20.



terly consumed with Terrors. *As a Dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their Image.*

But though some signal Examples of Vengeance may now and then be requisite to keep up, or to retrieve, in Mankind a Sense of their Dependence upon the God who governs them; yet

3. *Thirdly*, A farther Reason, why this is not the constant Process of the divine Councils, is that our present State is designed not so much for *Retribution*, as for *Trial*; and consequently what *best* answers to the *latter* Purpose, is the *fittest* Portion for us. Now the Ends of *Trial* may be consulted as effectually, in a Station of *Prosperity*, as in a Post of *Adversity*; since each hath its proper Temptations cleaving to it, which, upon Proof may exemplify the Firmness or Weakness of our several Virtues. And in all Reason and Decency it ought to be presumed, that the great Searcher of Hearts is the fittest Judge which of the two Conditions is most likely to approve them. So that from his allotting  
to

to the Wicked either the one or the other, it cannot with any kind of Probability be inferred, that they are, for that single Reason, the Objects either of his *Hatred* or *Love*. Now the Prosperity of the Wicked can upon no Account pass for an Objection against the Providence of God, except it could thence be concluded, that he is either a Lover of Sin, or at lowest, stands neuter to the Interests of Holiness. But neither of these Consequences will follow when it is considered, that this World is intended for nothing more nor farther than a State of *Trial*, in which Adversity may approve the Graces of his faithful Servants, whilst Prosperity shall foil and shall betray the Virtues of his *Rebel Subjects*.

The present Scene is utterly unfit for a State of exact *Retribution* from the Hand of Providence. We should easily fall into a Persuasion, that we have nothing farther to expect beyond it, if the Recompences of Vice and Virtue were here distributed with an *uniform* and *constant Punctuality*. And indeed by such

an OEconomy, we should lose the best Argument for a future State, which natural Reason yet hath furnished. So that hence we should grow more attach'd to the World, more devoted to its Cares, more afraid of its Misfortunes, and more fond of its Enjoyments, than the Interests of Virtue will in any wise permit; which therefore would suffer more deeply by such a Sort of Regard, than by any Appearances of Neglect or Coldness to them. For when God undertakes avowedly to punish, the Evils he inflicts, it may be reasonably presumed, will be real and substantial Mischiefs, what with all possible Care and Diligence we should endeavour to avoid: In like Manner, when he professedly enters upon the Dispensation of his Rewards, the good Things he distributes, it may as fairly be conceived, will be solid and important Blessings; such as will deserve the Employment of all our Industry and Application to secure them. So then, if his Rewards and Punishments were severally to consist in the good or evil Things of the *Life which*



now is, what were this but to allow them the very Character, which Religion most labours to depreciate, and to justify that Affection for them, which it is the Business of Virtue to suppress and mortify?

4. *Fourthly*, Therefore, and finally, it is hence apparent, if there were no positive Declarations extant from him concerning it, that God hath in Reserve *a Day wherein he will judge the World with the exactest Righteousness*, and reward us all according to our Deeds: It follows, I say, as a certain Consequence from the promiscuous Distribution of Adversity and Prosperity in this *present* Life; that there must and will be a Life *beyond* it, in which the Righteousness of our holy Judge will perfectly clear up the Honour of his Government, and signalize his never-failing Regard to his Laws.

Wherefore, since this is no proper Place for an exact Distribution of Punishments or Rewards; since the established Order of Things, and the regular Course of Events must be over-born

and disconcerted, by any uniform or distinguish'd Interposals of Providence in the Correction of Sin; since the Exercise of our Faith, the Trial of our Virtue, and the Liberty of our Actions, would all be precluded by such a Method of Administration; these, I think, are Reasons sufficient why no such Method is taken in the Government of the World, and will vindicate all the seeming Inequalities which are to be found in it.

And since they plainly open to us the View of the future Retribution, *thither* we should finally refer all the Difficulties we meet with in considering or adjusting the Dealings of Providence. At the Conclusion of this great and entangled Plot, the several Parts of it will appear unravell'd, with all the Beauty of the Design, and all the Wisdom of the Execution.

Mean while from an Expectation and a Prospect so reasonably founded, the Wicked may be taught to abate of their *Presumption*, and the Righteous to lift up their Hearts above *Despondency*.

The

## SERMON XII.

325

The *present Impunity* of the one, instead of furnishing any Argument for their *Safety*, concludes them, we have seen, under the greater *Danger*. As the *present Discouragements* of the other, instead of ministring any farther Occasion to their *Fears*, may be improved into a Reason for the Support of their brightest *Hope*.

Objections against Providence are so far from deriving hence any formidable Countenance, that Objections much stronger might be drawn from any contrary Measures which should be dealt out to us. But the *Generation* of God's *Children* is the last Class of Persons in the World, who should pertinaciously indulge their Scruples or Complaints. Even when their *Flesh* and *their Heart faileth*, they should know and should remember, that *God is the Strength of their Heart*, and their *Portion for ever*. For assuredly the Day will come, when such as *forsake him shall perish*: And therefore we all may safely rest in the wise Conclusion of our holy Psalmist, that *it is good for us to hold us fast*



by God, to put our Trust in the Lord God,  
and to speak of all his Works in the Gates  
of the Daughter of Sion.

To him be Glory and Dominion now and  
ever.





## SERMON XIII.



PHILEM. 10.

*I beseech thee for my Son Onesimus,  
whom I have begotten in my  
Bonds.*



THE Words I have read to  
you contain the Design of  
the whole Epistle; and if it  
were not too great a Tref-  
pass upon the Rules which Custom hath  
prescribed to Discourses of this Nature,  
the whole Epistle should be my Text,

as I mean the whole of it for my present Subject.

The chief Aim of our Apostle in it was persuading *Philemon*, a Person of good Account in the City of the *Colossians*, to receive and to pardon a fugitive Servant, who had run away from his Master, and purloin'd (it should seem) some of his Effects. The Servant chancing to meet at *Rome* with *St. Paul*, then a Prisoner for the Cause of *Christ*, became our Apostle's Convert, as the Master *Philemon* had been before him. Now it was a Rule in those Days held inviolable, that *baptismal Repentance cancell'd all preceding Guilt*: So that what God was supposed already to have pardoned, *Man* might with the more Reason and Decency be requested to forgive.

Appeasing the Master's Resentments, and opening the Servant's Way to a favourable Reception (I have told you) was *St. Paul's* Design in this elegant Letter; which being taken up with a Matter so private and personal, some few of the Ancients made a doubt whether it should be received into the sacred Canon.

But



But as it furnishes some useful Lessons to direct our Practice, which in due Time shall be observed to you, this Objection was soon over-ruled, and the Rank to which its own, and its Author's Merit entitled it, was without great Difficulty assign'd to it.

As it gives us, besides, a notable Specimen of our Apostle's Talent in the Art of Persuasion, and draws out a Sketch of the most moving Eloquence, which perhaps is to be found in the most famous Masters; they, who upon ill-judged Rules of Criticism, object to the Style and Manner of the holy Scriptures, may stand hence corrected for, and ashamed of their petulant Cavils. For considering the Extent and Compass of it, I will venture to affirm, that Art and Oratory do no where appear employed in a more affecting Manner, than here by our Apostle in this short Address.

In Points argumentative, and in Questions of Doctrine he every where speaks like a Man of Sense, and a Master of the Cause before him. And he chuses  
his

Topics of Discourse, with a View always to the Sentiments and Apprehensions of those he was to deal with, which they who overlook will lose the Strength and Beauty of his Arguments; as when you hear or read them in short and broken Portions, distinguish'd in the modern Way by Versicles and Chapters, you can very hardly enter into the Spirit of the Writer, or into the Drift and Compass of his Reasoning. But if you would pursue him as you do other Authors, consider in one View the Scope and Occasion of his Argument, observe what his Business led him to say, what his Opponents expected from him, and what at last he offers in answer to them; I doubt not but you would then perceive him as close, as pertinent, as just, and as acute a Writer, as any of those celebrated Masters whom the Vogue of the World hath most extolled for the Politeness and Delicacy of their respective Performances.

This I can only now in general suggest to you, with regard to his other Works: But the Epistle before you is short,

short, and therefore capable of having its Beauties more particularly deduced to you.

And I am the more inclined to proceed in this Way, because I look upon this Performance of our Apostle to be in its Kind a Master-piece; which yet, I think, you will not find observed in any of the Commentators; nor the particular Topics of Persuasion, whereupon he dwells, mark'd out (as they deserve) to their especial Notice.

When I have gone thro' this Part of my Design, I shall farther Point to you those practical Lessons, which the main Scope of the Epistle will warrant me to draw from it.

We may divide it (for Method's Sake) into four principal Sections,

I. The Inscription.

II. The Introduction.

III. The main Body of the Letter, which contains the chief Business of it.

IV. And finally, the Conclusion.

I. The



I. The very Inscription contained in the three first Verses, tho' usually a Matter of Indifference and slight Regard, is not here without some Marks of Skill and Contrivance; which will best, I think, be illustrated in the Way of Paraphrase. As thus: *Paul, a Prisoner of Jesus Christ*, under that View certainly, the more venerable and more compassionate, and *Timothy our Brother*, endear'd to us by his *personal* Worth, as well as by his Office of an *Evangelist* and *Bishop* in the Christian Church; *unto Philemon, our dearly beloved*; who therefore should hold himself bound to all fit Returns in the Offices of Love, and as a *Fellow-Labourer* in publishing the Notice of the Gospel, should be kind and indulgent to Converts, (one of whom *Onesimus* his Servant now was) and should ease, as much as he could, all Partakers of the common Work; in which *St. Paul*, tho' an Apostle and a Pillar of the first Magnitude, by calling *Philemon* his *Fellow-Labourer*, condescensively represents himself upon a Foot of Equality, as his Partner

ner and Associate. But lest these Regards should not make a sufficient Impression, he proceeds to interest in his following Request, the beloved *Apphia*, probably Wife of *Philemon*; *Archippus* Bishop of the Place, whom he dignifies with the Title of *Fellow-Soldier*, as having perhaps been a Sufferer for the Cause of *Christ*; with whom he thought fit to join the several Domestics of *Philemon*, and hath honoured them with the Name and Character of a *Church*. To all these he hath left upon Record the usual Apostolical Benediction, *Grace and Peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*. Thus much for the Inscription.

II. The Introduction follows next in Order; which proceeds from the Beginning of the fourth to the end of the seventh Verse; and is addressed to *Philemon* singly.

*I thank my God (saith our Apostle) making mention of thee always in my Prayers, bearing of thy Love and Faith, which thou hast towards the Lord Jesus and to-*  
wards

wards all Saints. *That the Communion of this Faith may become effectual, by the acknowledging of every good Thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great Joy and Consolation in thy Love, because the Bowels of the Saints are refreshed by thee, Brother.*

Nothing could more sensibly engage a Man already well-disposed, to persevere in his good Works, than such an honourable Acknowledgment of his former Behaviour.

The Apostle begins with telling him, he was always in his Prayers; and never in his *Prayers*, but that he found an Occasion of mixing with them his *Praises* to God, for the Eminence of his Faith in *Christ*, and of his Love and Charity to the distressed Members of the Christian Church. Now

The Prayers of an Apostle, of an Ambassador from *Christ*, immediate and undoubted, to whose *Person* without all peradventure (if not allowed to his Office) our great Master had promised, that *whose soever Sins he should remit they should be remitted unto him*; I say, Prayers



ers of *such Authority, such Efficacy*, must have been of great Account with all who believed the Truth of the Christian Religion, and the Importance and Dignity of an Apostle's Commission. Wherefore when these were offer'd with Frequency and Constancy to the Throne of Grace, on the Behalf of any particular Person; that Person, if he had any Spark of Ingenuity, any Sense of Gratitude, must needs apprehend himself engaged inviolably to all possible Returns for a Favour and a Privilege of such confessed Importance. And when it should appear moreover recorded to his everlasting Honour, that his Faith in *Christ*, and his Love to *Christ's* Followers, had given *great Joy and Consolation* to such an eminent Officer in the *Household of Faith*, great Occasion of Thanksgiving to God, as well as of Emulation and Example to his Christian Brethren; if such a Person had *any Spirit, any Zeal, any Vehemence of Desire to grow in Grace*, and to *go on unto Perfection*, these Encouragements could not fail of pushing him to all proper Lengths,  
nor

nor of persuading him to exert any farther Act of Benevolence within his Compass and Power.

Every Thing then in this Introduction was just and true; opportunely mentioned, and judiciously inculcated. Each Circumstance in it had an engaging Tendency, to open a favourable Passage for the Request which followed it. This is therefore our

III. *Third* Section, which we find beginning with the eighth, and ending with the one and twentieth Verse.

The Apostle introduceth it with a gentle Hint, that, in virtue of his Office, he might enjoin *Philemon* a Thing so fit and so convenient; might not only press upon him the *general* Command of Forgiveness, Meekness, and Patience; but, as one inspired from above, might apply it to the *particular* Exigence then before him, and make it a *specific* Demand upon his Obedience: Yet, to avoid the Suspicion of interposing in secular or domestic Affairs, *as a Ruler and a Judge*, he chuses rather for *Love's Sake* to beseech him, be-

*ing such an one as Paul the aged, and then also a Prisoner of Jesus Christ, (to beseech, I say, Philemon) for his Son Onesimus, whom he had begotten in his Bonds.*

It is *hard* in other Words, *impossible* in *better*, to express or illustrate the *rich* and Beauty of this eloquent Application.

*Philemon* and *Onesimus*, were (*both*) our Apostle's Converts, and in that spiritual Sense his Children *begotten* by him: *Both* in this Sense were his Debtors; and as he was a Leader, much more an *inspired* Leader in the Christian Church, they were bound to him in the Ties of a more especial Observance. He was now almost worn out in the Labours of the Gospel, and in the Service of their common Master. Under these moving Circumstances *Paul the aged*, venerable for his Years, distinguish'd in his Character and Station, eminent for his natural and supernatural Endowments, after a great Part of his Life exhausted in immense Activity and Fatigue for the Advancement of *Christ's* Religion, intreats one Member of it to be kind and favourable,



ble, condescensive and compassionate towards another; both alike the Objects of his Care and Love.

As a spiritual Guide, he intimates, with all engaging and becoming Tenderness, what he might well expect that a Person standing in a spiritual Relation to him, one intimately attach'd, one infinitely obliged to him, should perform at his Instance, for another standing upon the Ground of a like spiritual Relation.

As an Apostle and Evangelist, he useth the Interest which those Characters might well suppose in him, *with a Convert for a Convert*. As a Person in Distress and Bondage for the common Cause, he bespeaks *one Retainer to it, in Favour of another*. As a Friend, he addresseth himself *to a Friend for a Friend*. As a *Father*, he invites, solicits, persuades, (and who then would not think all this should *command*? a Son *disobliged*, to enter upon Terms of Reconciliation with a Son *offending*, but *penitent*. As an *indulgent Creditor* to two *insolvent Debtors*, he only

ly desires that one of them would insist upon no rigorous Advantage against the other. As an authorized Instrument in procuring the Pardon of God for *both* of them, he beseeches the *Injured* to forgive the *Injurious*: And the *Moral* of the whole Argument suggests to us, that no one among the Sons of Men should bear hard upon another in any Relation or Circumstance of Life, when they are all the Objects, as these two in particular were both Partakers, of the Divine Compassions.

From this general Plea our Apostle, that he might not seem too partial, proceeds at the 11<sup>th</sup> Verse to a more particular Acknowledgment of the Delinquent's Offence; that in *Time past* he had been *unprofitable* to *Philemon*, had answered neither to the Importance of his Name (which in *Greek* signifies *profitable*) nor to the Tenor of his Obligations: But then he softens all by a kind and favourable Suggestion, that thenceforth he was likely to be *profitable* to the Apostle himself, as well as to his Master with whom heretofore he had dealt *un-*  
Z 2
faithfully

faithfully. The Religion to which he was now a Convert, would be sure to instruct him in all those Duties to which any Relation of Life obliged him. So that from the Circumstance of his being a Christian, *Philemon* might henceforward be sure of him as a conscientious and faithful Servant. And with this View our Apostle returns him to his former Master; supported by the following strong Recommendation. — *Do thou therefore receive him that is mine own Bowels.*

A Word could not have been pitch'd upon more expressive of St. Paul's Affection for his much-loved *Onesimus*, than when he called him his *own Bowels*. One who had any Esteem or Reverence for the holy Apostle, could never after this bear hard upon a Person, near and dear to him as his own Heart.

Yet loth as our Apostle was to part with him, and notwithstanding the Right he might have claim'd to keep *Onesimus* with him, that in *Philemon's* stead he might have ministred to him in the Bonds of the Gospel; he puts at  
 7 last



last the Issue of the whole Cause upon *Philemon's* Generosity, that his *Benefit* might appear unconstrained and free. — *Whom I would have retained* (saith he) *with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the Bonds of the Gospel; but without thy Mind would I do nothing, that thy Benefit should not be as it were of Necessity, but willingly.* Nothing could be more likely to work upon a Man of Honour and Ingenuity, than such a gentle Touch to remind him of his Duty, at the same Time attended with such a frank Resignation of him to his own *Liberty*.

He subjoins with wonderful Art, and a Master-like Dexterity, the *Good* which was likely to arise out of this *Evil*; and the favourable Turn which now appeared providentially given to an Action, not otherwise *excusable*, tho' under this View of it the more *pardonable*. *Perhaps he therefore departed for a Season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.* Great apparently was *Philemon's* Profit, if the short Absence of a *bad* Servant proved the Occasion of returning him a *good* one, never more to leave him. The

Apostle was too intent upon his Cause, and too quick-sighted to miss the Improvement of such a pertinent Hint. He displays it accordingly to the Master with all Advantage; and with this farther Turn of it in favour to *Onesimus*; *not now to receive him as a Servant, but above a Servant, a Brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the Flesh and in the Lord?* The Circumstance which returned him to his Master with the fore-mentioned Advantages, *St. Paul* with great Address insinuates, did entitle him to a more favourable Treatment and to better Usage than the common Fate of Servitude (in those Days very hard and rigorous) would have otherwise allotted to him. Dear as he was to the Apostle, and dearer still (as the Apostle fain would make him) to his Master, upon the Score of former Services as well as of his new Engagements (the late Offence supposed to be forgotten) *St. Paul* afresh recommends him as a Christian and a Brother, to be received with the Endearments due to  
that

that near and honourable Relation. *If thou count me therefore a Partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine Account; I Paul have written it with mine own Hand, I will repay it. Albeit, I do not say to thee, how thou owest unto me, even thine own self besides. Yea, Brother, let me have Joy in thee in the Lord, refresh my Bowels in the Lord.*

Could a Convert to an Apostle, sensible of the mighty Blessings he had receiv'd thro' his Agency and Endeavours, refuse him a Boon so movingly recommended? Could he add (do we think) *Afflictions* to the *Bonds* of an aged Sufferer for the Cause of *Christ*, by distressing a Fellow-Convert, for whom the Apostle appeared so infinitely solicitous? No! The Gospel then had other-guise Effects upon the Hearts of its Followers. They who *continued in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship*, had too much Reverence for their Persons, and too grateful a Sense of their pious Labours, to grieve them by any Marks of Coldness, or any Tokens of Neglect.



Just was therefore that *Confidence*, which St. Paul expresses in *Philemon's Obedience*, to whom he wrote knowing that he would also do more than he had said. Which by the Way was an elegant and artful Way of persuading him, to perform at least the full Amount of his Request to him.

But yet lest a *Letter*, tho' written with all the moving Skill of Insinuation and Address, should cool upon the *Reader's* Hands, the *Writer*

IV. Propounds in the *Conclusion* to reinforce it with his own *Presence*, which would not so easily take a Refusal; hinting withal to *Philemon* in Terms of *Modesty*, but great *Significancy*, the Importance of his Company, and the mutual Endearments, which, whether present or absent, were to pass between them. *I trust that thro' your Prayers I shall be given unto you.*

Then he closes this admirable Epistle with proper Salutations, and with the customary Benediction.

Here, I think, we may make a Pause, and stay a little to reflect upon the rich

rich and useful Variety of Style and Manner among the sacred Pen-men of holy Scripture, the plain unaffected Simplicity of their Historical Narrations, the lofty Flights, the bold Figures, the lively Images, the majestic Solemnity, the familiar Addresses, the Predictions, (some literal, some mystical) which are observable in the several Prophets, as they respectively differ in Talent and in Genius, and in the several Occasions whereupon they exerted them; the Strength and Compass of *St. Paul* in his Reasonings and Argumentations; the Vivacity of his Spirit, and the Persuasiveness of his Eloquence, together with the softer Notes and more humble Strains of those other inspired Authors, who have bequeath'd to the Church very serviceable Lessons of Doctrine and Practice; *Diversity of Gifts* proportion'd to the Diversity of Tempers and Talents, of Sentiments and Apprehensions, for which they were severally intended! Let the petulant Objector content himself then with the *Seat of the Scorn*, without assuming the Chair of  
of

2 Tim. iii.  
16, 17.

of the Critic, or the Pretensions of a Judge; let him know at last, (and be ashamed if he cannot of himself discern it) that all *Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Repraof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness; That the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnish'd unto all good Works.*

Even this small Portion of it, which seems of all other most personal and private, will furnish us with three very useful Reflexions. The

I. *First* which I shall mention, is this, That every Christian how mean soever in his outward Condition of Life, is entitled to a considerable Degree of our Esteem and Respect. The State of Servitude was rated in our Apostle's Days at a much lower Estimate, upon the Foot of *Purchase*, than now it is upon the Foot of *Contract*. Yet we see with what Zeal and Earnestness, with what Solitude and personal Concernment our Apostle labours the Interest of one, who had broken thro' all Terms with his Master, was perfectly at Mercy,



ey, and had cast himself upon it. So that if Servitude would admit any Degrees of higher and lower, he was certainly now in the very *lowest* Class of it. But *St. Paul* (it appears) considered him as a *Man*, and as a *Christian*; and as such, alike entitled to the main Advantages of Being, with the most elevated and exalted Dignities of this World. He speaks of him in *one* Sense as a *Brother beloved*, in *another* as a *Son*, in *both* as the Object of his tenderest Concern. Yet,

2. *Secondly*, The Christian Religion doth not abolish those useful and necessary Distinctions of Life, whereby the World is kept in order, and Society is preserved upon a Foot of Government and Subjection. For *Onesimus* was still a Servant to *Philemon*, notwithstanding that he was become a Christian; and without his Master's Leave, our Apostle would claim no Right in him. *Tribute to whom Tribute is due, Custom to whom Custom, Fear to whom Fear, Honour to whom Honour*, is as much a Rule of Grace as of Nature; and the Gospel hath

hath added its special Encouragements to the due Discharge of all relative Obligations.

It was none of its blessed Author's Purpose to *destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them*. So that he cancelled no moral Duties which he found here. But,

3. *Thirdly*, He hath meliorated and improved them, to the great Advantage of the Persons, respectively concerned in all relative Engagements. The *Superior*, by observing the Rules of the Gospel, and by demeaning himself with Forbearance and Condescension to his *Inferior*, is in a much fairer Way of finding his Demands upon that *Inferior* answered to his Satisfaction, than he would be by Pride and Insolence and arrogant Expectations: As the *Inferior*, by a Deportment suitable to his *lower Station*, is much more likely to draw upon himself, the Regard and Countenance of his *Superior*, than he would be by Sturdiness and Stiffness, by Sullenness and Rudeness, or by any over-nice

Debates

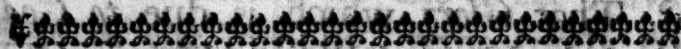
Debates upon the precise Measures of Obedience.

If the Christian Religion were as much in the *Hearts* of its several Professors, as it is in their open *Mouths*, in their fierce Disputes, in their noisy Contests with each other, upon Subjects which very few of them know otherwise than by rote; what a blessed Harmony would it produce amongst us? That *Glory* which is due to God on high for his good Will to Men, would then be blazon'd to great Advantage upon Earth, by bringing Peace to it. But whilst the *unruly Wills and Affections of sinful Men* have so great a Sway in it; to our best Endeavours for the Happiness and Tranquillity of human Life, we can only add our most fervent Prayers to the God of Order and of Peace; beseeching him in his infinite Compassions, to grant, *That the Course of this World may be so peaceably ordered by his Governance, that his Church may joyfully serve him in all godly Quietness, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.*





## SERMON XIV.



2 SAM. xii. 7.

*And Nathan said to David, thou  
art the Man——*



THE Case which my Text relates to was a Message from God to King *David*, upon Occasion of a grievous Injury offered by him to a faithful Subject and Servant, whose Bed he first corrupted, and then, in the common Progress of adding Iniquity to Iniquity, succeeded afterwards in a foul Attempt upon his Life.

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This complicated Sin was too crying and heinous to escape the Notice and Vengeance of Heaven. The Person who had committed it, was much in Favour with God, for many great and good Qualifications which he possessed in a very eminent Degree before his shameful Lapse. And therefore he was not given up immediately to a reprobate Mind, without some signal Vouchsafements and Endeavours to reclaim and to reform him. But the Prophet *Nathan* was sent express upon this Errand, with a special Commission from above to awaken and retrieve him. There are

Two general Considerations arising from the Text thus opened.

I. The Behaviour of the *Prophet* in *delivering* his Message.

II. The Behaviour of the *King* in *retrieving* it. And there are diverse Inferences which may be *fairly grafted* upon the Process of this whole Transaction, which yet, I foresee, must be postponed to some farther Opportunity.

I. I begin with the Behaviour of the Prophet in *delivering* his Message; where two Particulars offer themselves to our especial Notice.

1. The Circumspection and Civility of his former Address.

2. The peremptory Plainness of his latter Application.

1. I observe the Circumspection and Civility of his former Address, introduced with a Parable, a Way much in vogue, and very taking with the Eastern Countries. There was some Chance that *David* might be moved with a distant Hint, and distinguish the *Original* in a proper *Likeness*. Good Manners, however, became a Court, and a King was not to be reprov'd like a common Offender, tho' here, it is evident, he was a very grievous Transgressor. Yet the Person whose Office it was to admonish him, forgot not that he was his Subject; and tho' he had a special Warrant from Heaven to *set* his *Misdeeds* before him, yet his first Attempt was to do it in a Way, which might render the *Prophetic* Office least odious to the *Regal*; herein



herein at once and alike consulting the Regards of Decency and Prudence. He was sent with a serious Exhortation to reclaim his Sovereign from the Error of his Ways: This Part he performed in a private Application to him, which could not expose him to the Contempt or Hatred of his People; and even then he broke not in upon his Business with a malapert or sawcy Bluntness, but he smoothed his Passage, and, as it were, felt out his Way to it by Circumstance and Similitude, by gentle, soft, and leisurely Approaches. Had he done otherwise, he had probably gained no Point, nor left any to be gained, by those who should come after him. For a reasonable Disgust once given to Men in Power, by an ungracious Manner of fastening upon them an officious Kindness, can never turn to any good Account. The *Office* will be disrelish'd for the Sake of the *Person*, when grown unacceptable; and the great *Ends* of it will be defeated, wherever it entirely ceases to be agreeable. Nor was it at last intended, that the Duties of admonishing or reproving,

wherever we suppose them lodged, should break in upon those relative Obligations, whereby Order is preserved, and good Government is maintained amongst us. But now to *Speak Evil* of *Dignities*, or coarsely to them, must certainly weaken the Bands of Government, and consequently enfeeble the Protection we receive from it. The Ensigns of Majesty are not without their Use, inasmuch as they are apt to draw after them Observance and Respect. The Analogy of the same Reason will suggest to us, that too familiar a Treatment of the Persons, or too lavish a Censure upon the Actions of those in Authority, must breed a Contempt of them; which, I say, must tend to burst asunder the Ligaments of Society, and to dissolve the Alliance between *Rule* and *Subjection*. This will hold for an eternal Truth, founded in the Reason of Things, as well as in the Oracles of God, which a *Preacher* of *Righteousness* should no more be afraid of speaking to his *People* than he should be of speaking to his *Prince*, when call'd to it, the

Words

*Words of Truth and Soberness*, whether palatable, or displeasing to the one or to the other. *St. Paul*, we may remember, had a very great Provocation given him by *Ananias*, who came into the high Priesthood by Methods, we are sure, very opposite to God's original Institution. But yet some Regards were due to the *Office*, whoever should be the Person wearing it; as it was indeed impossible that the Ends of it should be answer'd without paying them: Upon which View the good Apostle soon corrected himself for an unseasonable Word which his Resentment had drawn from him; and presently acknowledged the Obligation incumbent upon *all*, *not to* Acts xxiii, 2 — 6.  
*speak Evil of the Ruler of their People.*

In the Case before us, here was a *Prophet*, who had a direct and immediate Commission from God, to reprove his *Prince* for two very grievous and *wasting* Sins. And his Conduct upon it is well worth our Observation. Did he publish these Offences in the Streets; or cry them upon the House-tops? Did he harangue the People upon the Mis-



chiefs which must arise from them, expose them by Ridicule and Satyr, or make them the Subjects and Entertainments of common Conversation? No! This had been quite out of Character in a *Prophet* of the most high God. But to the *Prince* himself he resorts upon his weighty Ambassy; forgets not the Commission he was charged with, but yet in opening it remembers the Subject's Duty of Respect and Obedience to his Sovereign; and therefore handles the Matter with Tenderness and Caution, not *breaking* his Way, but *softening* it; not directly accusing, but symbolically appealing to him; not boldly reviling, but modestly reproving him; not censuring thro' mere Indulgence to a censorious Disposition, but with Views and Likelihoods of a Reformation; not unreasonably nor bluntly reproaching him with his Guilt, but prudently and circumstantially reminding him, *from whence he was fallen*. This was his first Attempt upon his Royal Charge; and had the great Man given any Signs of hearkning to these general Hints, which the good Prophet

Prophet gave him, or of applying the *Parable* to the *Moral* meant by it, here, in much Likelihood, would have been an End of all farther Expostulation.

But when the Prophet saw that his *Fable* was mistook for *History*; that the intended Application was not made by the Person most concerned to make it; that the Heinousness of a Fact somewhat Parallel, was however acknowledged, and a Way thereby opened to a more explicit and particular Manner of dealing with him; he proceeds

2. In the next Place to be more plain and peremptory, and, in the Words of my Text, to tell the King directly, *Thou art the Man*. He seems to have wish'd, that the King would have understood him in a Parable more remotely pointing to his Case; otherwise, one might well imagine, he would never have taken such a round-about Way of coming at him: But since *David* either did not, or would not thus understand him; the Prophet was fairly acquitted of all unnecessary or peevish Interposals. Nothing now was left to him, but to expo-

stulate the Case as it really stood, to remind King *David* of the Blessings which God had heaped upon him, and of the discouraging Returns he had made for such singular Vouchsafements. I need not repeat the Message at Length, which you may read at your Leisure, from my Text down to the thirteenth Verse of this Chapter.

Throughout the whole Tenour of it, we may observe the undaunted Bravery of the Prophet's Spirit, in the fearless and plain Delivery of a Message, not likely to please a Man of *Pleasure*, but very likely to offend him in the Height of his *Power*. "*Thou art the Man!*" The  
 " Man whom thy own Sentence hath  
 " condemned as unworthy of Life; the  
 " Man whom unbounded Lust and  
 " outrageous Injustice have outlawed  
 " from the Privileges of human So-  
 " ciety; the Man who hast broken  
 " thro' all the Obligations of Honour  
 " and Friendship, of Righteousness and  
 " Probity, and hast sacrificed a brave  
 " unfortunate Subject whom thou  
 " shouldst have protected, a Lover of  
 " his



“ his King, and a Defender of his Coun-  
 “ trey, to the lawless and vile Embraces  
 “ of a wanton Prostitute; the Man,  
 “ who ungrateful to the Author of thy  
 “ Being, and of innumerable Blessings  
 “ conferred upon thee, hast *forgotten*  
 “ *God thy Saviour, who hath done so great*  
 “ *Things for thee* ; who raised thee from  
 “ a Cottage to a Throne, and in all  
 “ Points hath *given thee thy Heart’s De-*  
 “ *sire* ; yet *thou art the Man*, who in  
 “ Spight of all the Favours, wherein  
 “ the Goodness of thy Creator hath a-  
 “ bounded towards thee, hast defaced  
 “ his Image, disconcerted the Measures  
 “ of his Providence, trampled under  
 “ Foot the Authority of his Govern-  
 “ ment, broke in upon those Rules and  
 “ Orders of human Society, which it  
 “ was thy Province to maintain, and  
 “ hast given up all these great and  
 “ weighty Considerations to the un-  
 “ temper’d Heat of a lascivious Dispo-  
 “ sition ! ”

Respect, I have observed, with-held  
 the Prophet for a Season from being  
 thus plain and peremptory with his

Sovereign; but when softer Methods proved unavailable, and it was apparent that nothing less than a direct and down-right Application to him would bring him to Recollection, the Prophet would no longer conceal the Charge he was entrusted with, nor weaken the Force and Authority of his Message, by mincing the Contents or disguising any Part of it, with complaisant and artful Mitigations. As all was to pass between them two in private, and the Prince was no way exposed by it in the Ears of his People, the Prophet might well apprehend himself the more at Liberty to be plain with him. He could hurt, he knew, none but himself by an Offence thus given to, or taken by, a Man in Power; which was no sufficient Reason to the Prophet for baulking his Commission, or for not acting up to the full Extent of it. His Orders ('tis true) were special and immediate, and both Case and Person were particularly marked out to him; Circumstances these which may be thought to have inspired him with a Courage  
he

he would not otherwise have exerted; as somewhat perhaps there might be in these which gave his Example a peculiar Lustre: Yet the Main of it *all* must follow, who are vested in an Office obliging them to the Duties of Admonition and Reproof. The Regards of Decency, Discretion, and Prudence must point them to the Occasion, which here indeed was singled out by a special Direction from the Finger of God; but general Orders will certainly meet with particular Cases and Circumstances, in which they must be executed. Whether the Derivation of them be mediate or immediate, makes little Difference, when once we are persuaded that they proceed in the highest and last Resort from the Will of God. For then, whenever a Juncture opens which calls for our Obedience, and for our Discharge of the Trust reposed in us; the Integrity and Courage observable in this illustrious Precedent will claim our Imitation. Sin is no where to be shelter'd; it must be beaten out of all its strong Holds; no Sanctuary should be



be suffered to protect it, no Veil to conceal it, no Greatness to varnish it, no Multitudes to encourage it, no Appearances of Holiness to sanctify nor disguise it. If the *Fear of God* and an awful Reverence for his righteous Laws, be not in this Case our leading Principles, the *Fear of Man* will be too apt to ensnare us, to make us tame and indolent in the Interests of Religion, and too much resigned to the *Pleasure* of those, whose Profit we ought to study; and whose *Souls we should watch for, as they that must give an Account.*

To desert this important Charge thro' Negligence or Sloth; to betray it by mean and poultry Condescensions; to soothe the rich and powerful in their Sins; to swim down with the Tide of popular and prevailing Errors; to be afraid of speaking the Truth, when our Friends and Favourites, when the Party we are most attach'd to, when the Persons on whom we are depending, when great Men or great Numbers, do, in our Opinion, swerve from it; how contrary is this in every Branch  
of

of it, to the glorious Pattern exhibited in my Text! How vile is the Appearance, and how shocking the Reverse of such a noble Example!

No Awe of imperial Majesty, no Dread of absolute Power, nor of the Use which Resentment might make of it upon this trying Occasion could damp the fearless Spirit of our courageous Prophet; who delivered his Message, and performed his Duty, and trusted the Consequence with the God who employ'd him.

And shall *we* who have the Authority of Laws to protect us in the due Execution of our weighty Trust, be afraid of displeasing by the Delivery of an unacceptable Message, or by the Utterance of ungrateful Truths? Shall *we* smooth our Way to the Honours and Profits of this Life, by *shunning to declare the whole Counsel of God*, when we have as fair a Chance for them, by *declaring*, as we may have by *concealing* it? Shall *we* weaken the *Terrors of the Lord*, which we so well *know*, by teaching any to *die in Peace*, who have *lived in Sin*,

*Sin*, or to *elude* the *Punishment*, without *avoiding* the *Crime* it is entailed on? Or finally shall *we* be apprehensive of what a World of Sin and Folly shall say, or shall conceive of us; or shall *we* direct our Conduct by such an uncertain Rule; who *have a sure Word of Prophecy to take Heed to*, a righteous, unerring Judge to account to, and a *Master in Heaven* who will recompence our well-meant Labours, and will effectually skreen his faithful Servants, from the injurious Blast of malicious and lying Lips?

Far be such abject degenerate Thoughts, and farther yet such base ignominious Practices, from all who consider themselves as the *Ministers of God, and Stewards of the Mysteries of Christ!*

Hitherto our Views have been employ'd upon the Prophet's Behaviour, in this nice and critical Conjunction; we have seen how perfectly well he acted up to Character; with what strict Regard to *Decency* as well as *Duty*. And may his Example in *both*, have many Followers!

And



And now from the Prophet's Behaviour, in the Delivery of his Message, proceed we,

II. *Secondly*, To our next general Consideration, which was the Behaviour of the King upon the *Reception* of it.

Here again, as under the former Article, there are two Particulars entitled to our especial Notice.

1. His Manner of receiving the remoter Application to him, in the Way of Parable and *general* Similitude.

2. His Behaviour upon the Prophet's more *particular* and peremptory Exposition with him.

1. His Manner of receiving the remoter Application to him, in the Way of Parable and *general* Similitude.

This he took in the usual Form, according to the common Guise of Partiality and Self-Love.

Do but alter the Attire and Cloathing of the most heinous Fact, the personal or local Circumstances which distinguish it; do but diversify the Scene,  
and

and change the Actors in it; and then you will easily have the genuine impartial Sense of the Man who committed it, and who will pronounce, perhaps, upon it with the utmost Severity.

The Case of the poor Man with his single Lamb injuriously forced from him by his great rich Neighbour had not half the Turpitude nor Guilt in it, which the Case of *Uriah*, the Violation of his Bed, and then the Snare for his Life involved in it. Yet *David*, like a righteous Judge who supposed himself unconcerned in it, very frankly censured the former Exorbitance, and allotted the Doom to it, which it so well deserved. Little did he imagine that the Sentence he was then pronouncing, so nearly affected his *Royal Person*, or touch'd upon a Fact, whereof himself had been guilty, in an higher Degree, and in a more flagrant Example.

This is the ordinary Process of human Judgment. In Matters of *Right* and *Wrong*, *Just* and *Unjust*, *Natural Conscience* and *Common Sense* enable us to

to determine and distinguish well enough, whilst *ourselves* are out of the *stion*, and utterly unconcerned in it. But let *our own Interest* be in any Manner depending upon the Discussion of it, and it is wonderful to observe, how a Change in this Circumstance, shall alter the State of it; how easily we shall slide over it, if utterly *indefensible*; or, if it will bear a *Debate*, how many *doubling Shifts*, *ingenious Querks*, *subtle Evasions*, and *nice Distinctions* the *Logic* of Sin will furnish, to *support a lame Cause*, to maintain the darling Argument of our own Innocence, or however to palliate our Deviations from it, under the *pitiabie Cover of human Frailty*. *Covetousness* shall then be *Prudence* and *Frugality*; *Drunkenness* nothing but an *Excess of good Nature*; *Pride* a *just and becoming Self-Regard*; *Wrath and Malice* shall be but *due Resentments*; *Murder* *Self-Defence*, or, at most, the Sally of an excusable Passion; and *Adultery* (for which the Modesty of former Ages had no Names of Mitigation) may derive from the *Ingenuity of modern Refinements*, the *extenuating*



tenuating Title of Gallantry and good Address.

Or if some of these Crimes be too confessedly heinous for any favourable Constructions, and natural Conscience should choak at them in spite of all Apologies; the next Artifice will be to silence the Voice of it, and to hush its Remonstrances in the various Amusements and Pleasures of Life. By some Methods or other, a Way will certainly be found either to *palliate* the *Guilt*, or to *stifle* those *Reflexions*, which *Reason*, if permitted, would be sure to make upon it. This is the usual Deceitfulness of Sin, and this is the Way by which it hardens us. The *Distinctions between Good and Evil* will not quite wear out; ordinarily we are ready to acknowledge them, where we are not personally concerned in them; but *Self* makes a mighty Difference, and we are brought with Difficulty to own our selves abandoned and vile Offenders. We should easily enough agree, that others would be so in any like Circumstances; but we shrink at the Application of the Character,

ter; when it comes too near us; we can neither believe, digest, nor bear with it, when it presses home upon us. Some Diversity in the Fact, or some Change in its Circumstances, we are apt and willing to imagine makes a total Alteration. So that we can hear, nay perhaps can *join* (as *David* here did) in a good deal of Censure and of Satyr, upon a Crime which our selves have committed even with greater Aggravations; and never once reflect, that we have any Part or Lot in it.

Such was the Behaviour of the King upon the Case before us; and such is the common Process of Partiality and Self-Love.

2. I wish I could likewise observe in the second Place, that his Conduct upon the Prophet's more particular and peremptory Application to him had as many Followers.

Here he seems to have been struck dumb for a while, when he was judged out of his own Mouth, and told that himself was the Man whose Crime he had just pronounced upon.

He did not then endeavour to recriminate upon the Prophet, nor mis-interpret his honest Freedom for pressing him so closely; but in the Language of an humble awakened Penitent he acknowledged to *Nathan*, that he had *sinned against the Lord*. His Breast was full charged with Reflexions upon his Guilt; and he could only vent himself for the present in those sad and sorrowful Words; *I have sinned against the Lord!*

Thus when natural Conscience, or the Spirit of God applies his Word to us, and brings home to our Hearts the Terror of his general Denunciations; when upon being told at large that they *who do such, or such Things, shall not inherit eternal Life*, we charge ourselves with the Commission of those very Crimes, and acknowledge the Wrath of God to be due to them; we answer then the Purposes of Heaven in threatening us with its Vengeance, which was originally meant to lead us to Repentance, and to secure our Escape from a final Condemnation.

God



God in his Mercy hath various Methods of darting in upon our Minds the Prefages of his fierce Displeasure; and of saying to each of us, *Thou art the Man.* For Example,

*His Word is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Discerner of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart.* <sup>Heb. iv. 12.</sup>

He hath still his Messengers and Ministers, who are to attend upon the several Duties of Exhortation, Admonition, and Reproof; to *warn the wicked Man from his wicked Way* in order to *save his Life*; to *cry aloud, and spare not*, to *lift up their Voice like a Trumpet*, and to *shew his People their Transgression.* <sup>Ezek. iii. 18. Isa. xxviii. 10.</sup>

He hath his *Spirit* to facilitate the Endeavours of the *one*, and to apply the several Hints and Intimations of the *other*; to *strive with Man*, and to rouse him from his indolent, impenitent State.

Finally, there is a vast Variety of *providential Calls* attending us at our going out and our coming in, through-

out all the Stages and Occurrences of human Life, to let in upon us a Sense of our Duty, and of the Danger we must incur by a Transgression of it.

If by these or any other of the manifold Methods of Grace, we can be brought to sober Recollection, and to a considerate Frame of Spirit, great is then the Hope, that due Reflexions upon our infinite Unworthiness may melt down each of us into penitential Tears; and then, in the Words of the Royal Penitent, we shall acknowledge, as he did, without Reserve; *I have sinned against the Lord*; and with the pious Ardor of the humble Publican in the Gospel; we shall *smite upon our Breasts* (each of us) and say, *God be merciful to me a Sinner.*

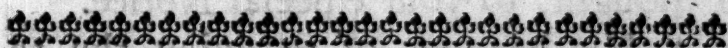
Luk. xviii.  
12.

Diverse Inferences, I have told you, might be drawn from this whole Transaction. But I must reserve them for another Opportunity.

S E R M O N



## SERMON XV.



2 SAM. xii. 7.

*And Nathan said unto David, Thou art the Man ———*



WE have already started two general Considerations from this Passage of Scripture.

I. The Behaviour of the Prophet in delivering his

Message.

II. The Behaviour of the King in receiving it.

I. The Behaviour of the Prophet, we farther observed, had two remarkable Circumstances in it.

B b 3

1. The



1. The Circumspection and Civility of his former Address; which remotely pointed to his Business in the Way of Parable and Similitude.

2. The peremptory Plainness of his latter Application, when the former Method proved unsuccessful.

II. In the Behaviour of the King there were also two Particulars entitled, I thought, to your especial Notice.

1. His Manner of receiving the remoter Application of the Prophet to him in the Way of Parable and Similitude; which he took in the usual Form, according to the common Guise of Partiality and Self-Love, without observing or acknowledging, that he had any Concern of his own in it.

2. His Behaviour upon the Prophet's more particular and peremptory Expostulation with him, which melted him down into penitential Tears. That startling Assertion from the one, *Thou art the Man*, extorted from the other this humble Confession, *I have sinned against the Lord!*

Diverse Inferences and Observations, I  
told

told you, might be drawn from the Process of this whole Transaction, which the last Time would not permit me to go thro' with, and therefore I reserved them for the next Opportunity, which being now, by the Blessing of God, before us, shall be employ'd in considering them.

I. The *first* Observation I shall make upon it, will be the Goodness of God to returning Sinners, and his Readiness to pardon them, upon their sincere Repentance.

No sooner was *David* struck with Compunction for his Wickedness, and had made a Confession of it, than a Declaration of Pardon was issued out in Form to him: *The Lord hath put away thy Sin* (saith the Prophet;) *Thou shalt not die.* The desponding Penitent may build upon this Foundation Encouragement and Comfort to himself, under the most enormous Aggravations of Guilt, for which he is truly contrite and humbled. Guilt of a deeper Dye than what was hence contracted is seldom seen

amidst the foulest Instances which can be named, even in the Dregs of modern Corruption. Yet God who saw the Agonies of his trembling Soul, now thoroughly awakened with a Sense of his infinite Ingratitude and Folly, poured in upon his wounded Spirit some *Oyl of Gladness*, refresh'd his *darkned Conscience* with some chearing Beams from the *Light* of his *Countenance*; in fine *wash'd him from his Wickedness, and cleansed him from his Sin.*

In the boundless Exuberance of God's Compassions towards the Children of Men, surely there is no Example of them which ought to be more endearing, than the great Condescension and Kindness he vouchsafes to them in his pardoning Grace. If we seriously reflect upon the Majesty of the Governor; the Holiness of the Law, the Reasonableness of paying it all Obedience; the manifold Engagements from Interest, common Sense, and Gratitude, which Offenders break thro'; the paultry Considerations which prevail with them against such mighty Motives; the outrageous



rageous Insolence of Dust and Ashes setting themselves up against the most high God and his righteous Commandments; the utter Insignificancy of the Persons thus presumptuously trampling upon the Authority and Measures of his wise Providence; and if to these several Views we add the unparallel'd Benignity of God our Saviour, in stooping down *from Heaven, the Habitation of his Holiness and Glory*, to *visit* such stupid ingrateful Wretches, who *dwell in Houses of Clay*, and to fit them up for Mansions of Immortality; we must certainly be lost in the Heights and Depths of such marvellous Love: The Contemplation of it must cast us into an Extasy of Joy and Wonder; and in the humble Strain of our devout Psalmist, we may breath out to God his pious Aspiration; *Lord, what is Man, that thou art mindful of him, and the Son of Man, that thou vittest him?* There was Room enough for this Acknowledgment, upon no other View, than of the infinite Distance between the Creator and the Creature, without any Regard to the Guilt and  
Ingra-

Psal.viii. 4.

Ingratitude of the one; or to the pardoning Grace and Mercies of the other. But when these Considerations are added to the Reckoning, what Return can we think of for such an Heap of Benefits so undeservedly conferred upon us? What Heart can conceive, or what Tongue can express such matchless Obligations? *The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole Family in Heaven and Earth is named, must first grant unto us according to the Riches of his Glory, to be strengthened with Might by his Spirit in the inner Man; Christ must dwell in our Hearts by Faith, we must be rooted and grounded in Love, before we shall be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the Length and Breadth and Depth and Height, or to know the Love of Christ, which after all surpasseth the scanty Dimensions of human Knowledge, till we come to be filled with all the Fullness of God.*

Ephes. iii.  
14, 15, 16,  
17, 18, 19.

But tho' there be indeed much Room for Wonder, and for some Degrees of Diffidence, when we view the Case of even Penitent Sinners in the Light which mere Nature affords it; yet when  
the

the Oeconomy of *Grace* steps in to their Assistance, our Wonder (it is true) may be allowed to continue, but our Diffidence ought to be abated; and then the Distrust which naturally arises from an Apprehension of God's Justice, should give Way to that Word of Truth, and to those gracious Promises, which encourage our Reliance upon his Goodness and Mercy. For

If under the Terrors of a more severe Dispensation, our *Lord* proclaimed himself a God *merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in Goodness and Truth,* <sup>Exod. xxxiv. 6,7.</sup> *keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin;* we know full well, that the Design of the Gospel was still more amiable and more engaging, that it was meant to give us a fuller Assurance of his gracious Purposes concerning us, to *set forth* his Son as a *Propitiation* we might depend on, *for the Sins of the whole World,* and to declare his *Righteousness for the Remission of Sins* <sup>Rom. iii.</sup> *which are past, thro' the Forbearance of God.* <sup>25.</sup>

Particular Persons have nothing to do, but to follow the Example of our Royal Penitent,



Isa. i. 16,  
17. 18.

Penitent, to *confess their Wickedness, and be sorry for their Sin*, after such a godly Sort, as may work in them a true Repentance, and bring forth the Fruits which are meet for it: Then, if they will hearken to the Advice of the Evangelical Prophet *Isaiah*, if they will wash them, *make them clean, put away the Evil of their Doings from before the Eyes of God, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, and plead for the Widow*; then, I say, they may well rest satisfied, tho' their Sins be as scarlet, that they shall be white as Snow; tho' they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wool. Yet

II. Tho' the desponding Sinner, bowed down with a Load of Guilt too heavy for him to bear, and above all Things desirous of Relief from it upon any Conditions; tho' such an one, I say, may hence be allowed to derive Encouragement and Comfort; yet the presumptuous Offender may also be reminded from a different View of the Case before us, that he hath great Reason to be

be awakened by it into a Sense of his Guilt and Danger. Strong and ardent was the Cry, great and plentiful were those Showers of Tears, which the Remorses of a sore-wounded Conscience drew from this humble afflicted Soul.

He *was plagued all the Day long, and chastened every Morning. I am weary* Psal. lxxiii. 14. Psal. vi. 6. (saith he) *with my Groaning; every Night wash I my Bed, and water my Couch with my Tears.* Observe the mournful Strains of his penitential Acknowledgments upon this very Occasion — *Have Mercy* Psal. lviii. 1, 2, &c. *upon me, O God, according to thy loving Kindness, according unto the Multitude of thy tender Mercies blot out my Transgressions — Wash me thoroughly from mine Iniquity, and cleanse me from my Sin — For I acknowledge my Transgressions, and my Sin is ever before me. Purge me with Hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than Snow. Make me to hear of Joy and Gladness, that the Bones which thou hast broken may rejoyce. Create in me a clean Heart, O God; and renew a right Spirit within me: Cast me not away from thy Presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from*

*from me.* Could any Thing be more devout, more humble, more expressive of his Sense that he had grievously offended, than were these moving Strains of his pious Eloquence? He was then in the full Strength and Vigour of his Age; surrounded with all the Temptations which the Licence of a splendid Court could afford him; he had all the Pleasures of it within his Reach; all the Honours of it were in his Disposal; and Flattery, I conceive, may be just as old as Wealth and Power, of which we may be therefore sure he had a sufficient Share, to have *blanch'd* his *Wickedness*, and, if possible, to have made a *Virtue* of it. Would he have hearkened to any such Insinuations, he might easily perhaps have believed, that the Prophet had forged his Commission; or if not a Deceiver, was himself deceived; that he was of a turbulent, angry, discontented Spirit; mistook the Suggestions of an over-heated and peevish Fancy for the Illuminations of Heaven, and for the Dictates of divine Revelation; that he knew not enough of the World,  
to



to indulge the great ones of it in proper convenient Liberties; that he was a Man of Retirement and Speculation, given up to the Delusions of his Office, to the Pedantry and Pertness of narrow Notions, and of impracticable Conceits.

This, or some Part of it, might easily have past upon a great Man and great Sinner too, who was not heartily ashamed of, and truly sorry for his Sin. Had any Remains of Affection to it been harboured in his Breast, some of these Hints might have revived its Interest and its Power with him. But he was too intimately conscious of his Guilt, and too well apprized of the Danger cleaving to it, to give into such fatal Notions, or to encourage such delusive Suggestions, if they were ever offer'd to him. He was therefore content to lay aside the Considerations of Pomp and Grandeur, when the Gust of them might well be supposed the strongest, and to humble himself before his God as one of the meanest and vilest amongst his rational Creatures. Nor  
I would

would all this avail for a plenary Pardon, without some mortifying Strokes to check him in any future Temptation, and to convince the World, that even in his most beloved Servants God would both *see* their Sin, and would avenge it. For the Prophet's Declaration of Forgiveness had, we find, a Clog upon it; and tho' the Lord had so far *put away* his *Sin*, that he was *not* to *die* for it, yet *because* by that *Deed* he had given great *Occasion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the Child, which was born unto him* from this wicked Fact, was to bear his Father's Iniquity, and to leave the Light of this World as soon as he should see it. And what was moreover threatened to him concerning the Desolations and Divisions of his Family in the eleventh Verse of this Chapter was to a Tittle accomplish'd; such a foul Example in the Father soon spread its Influence among the Children, and the next News we have of them produce the unhappy Tydings of Incest and Murder between *Abfalom*, a Son of *David's*, *Tamar* his Daughter, and their Brother *Amnon*. Nor did the *Sword* e-  
ver

2 Sam. xii.  
13, 14.

Cap. xiii.

*ver depart from his House, nor did he cease* <sup>1 Sam. xii.</sup>  
*to be a Man of War all the Days of his* <sup>10.</sup>  
*Life.* <sup>1 Chron. xxviii. 3.</sup>

Let the presumptuous Transgressor consider this Example in all its Circumstances, before he builds upon it any Conclusion favourable to his Practice. Let him be sure, if he can, that he shall repent as *David* repented; that he shall pour out his Soul in such strong Crying and Tears, as the Royal Penitent did; that he shall do it in the midst of the most potent Temptations to a Continuance in Sin; that he shall persevere for the Main, in an uniform Course of future Piety and Obedience; and let him be moreover conscious to himself of an Heart and Purpose all along upright in the Sight of God, 'till a powerful Seducement drew him aside from it, and cast him down a Precipice, where the Horror of the Fall was indeed (as in *David's* Case) exceedingly perillous and shocking, but from which however he recovered at the first happy Stop which was given him: Let all this, I say, be assured to him (as I think it cannot be to any Mortal) before he



draws the Case into Precedent, or founds upon it any impious Security; for any pretended Security which he founds upon it, must be always impious upon the foregoing Reasons. *David* sinned not upon any deliberate Prospect of a future Repentance; but after grievous Sins committed, thro' the Violence of strong ungovern'd Affections, he became a thorough Penitent; and even then the Punishment of his Sins was entailed upon him, in a Course of very bitter and afflictive Calamities; which he never survived, but found and felt the Plague of them attending him all the Days of his Life. So that upon a fair Estimate of Loss and Profit, of Pleasure and of Pain, from this unhappy Adventure, the History of his Reign will tell us, that the Balance run high against him. And if the abandon'd Libertine would rightly consult the Interests which he seems most fond of, he would find, I believe, no Reason to boast of his wretched Bargain, when he comes to sum up his Reckoning, upon Regards which are *purely temporal*: But when *even the Chances* for Eternity are taken into

into the Calculation; it surpasses the Power of Language to express his Folly in it. *There is Forgiveness with thee* Ps. cxxx. 4. (saith the holy Psalmist) *that thou may'st be feared.* Such a Forgiveness as this, is rather (I'm sure) a Motive to our Dread of God's Justice, than to any Presumption upon his Forbearance and Mercy. Unrepented Sin is sure of Vengeance; Repentance is a Thing uncertain to us; upon all Accounts therefore it is better not to need it, than to risque our whole Fortune upon an Issue so precarious. For I observe hence farther and

III. *Thirdly*, That Sin is naturally progressive, more apt to go forwards than backwards with any Man, who engages in it. The Nature of Facts makes it often necessary to proceed with them; or the Appetite accustomed to Indulgence will expect and claim it: All this while the Motives which should restrain him are weakened by being unattended to, and the more a Man sins, the more he may; the less Check he will feel in doing so, he will grow easy and

unconcern'd at it, the Practice will become familiar and thence delightful to him, and he will fall into it with the united Force of natural Inclination, and habitual Usage. From all these Views, the Hope of any future Repentance is considerably abated, and the Chances are great against it. In the Example now before us, Adultery could not be concealed, could not be enjoy'd with Credit or with Safety, except the injured Person were yet more injured; and so the Murder of him followed as necessary to stifle his Complaints, and to guard against the Consequences of his just Resentment. What a pitiful Figure doth a Sinner make, when skulking thus behind a Cover, and sneaking away from Observation under any Disguise he can lay hold of? How abject and inconsistent was the Conduct of this unhappy Prince, whilst a Coward to his injured Servant, and a Bravo to his offended God! He could not encounter the Face of a Man to whom he had been thus unjust and barbarous; yet was not afraid of God's all-seeing Presence



sence, whose *Eyes* he *knew* were *always* upon him, were *about* his *Path* and *about* his *Bed*, and *spied* out *all* his *Ways*.

This Inconsistency of Mind and Behaviour betray'd him into farther Mischief, and plunged him deeper into Wickedness, which before was deep enough to have overwhelmed his Soul. But thus the Necessities of his Guilt engaged and entangled him. He had thrown himself from the Guardianship of Grace and Providence by his first Transgression; the present Effects of which were likely to prove Mischievous to him, except he could ward them off by a second, which the same continued Passion made easy to him, abated the Shock and Horror of the Fact, and suppressed those Risings of Conscience which should have check'd him in it.

Observe the Process of the Case, and with it the usual Progress of Sin. It will appear from the second Verse of the eleventh Chapter in this Book, that Idleness produced a vicious Curiosity; that Curiosity a wicked Indulgence to a lewd Imagination; the Consequence of

which was Adultery, and the End of it Murder. This is enough to warn us of Sin in its first Approaches; which, if it be not nipped in the Bud and rejected in its earliest Motions, will creep into our Bosoms, and lodge itself in our Hearts, and will not thence remove without more Violence than the Tenderness of most Constitutions will endure. The Man who hath not Hardness enough in his Make to keep him innocent, will usually be too *soft* and self-indulgent to become a *Penitent*. Exceptions, I know, there are to this, and almost every other Rule which can be named to us: And even the Case before us is an Exception to it. But then you will remember that an express Message from Heaven produced it; and the Circumstances have been noted which distinguish this from most other Examples, and which are so many Reasons why it should not be drawn into Precedent, nor found any just Expectation of a like favourable Issue. Health is certainly the best Security to Life; altho' in Sickness it be reasonable to try

try the Powers of Medicine. But no wise Man would chuse his Sickness by Way of Experiment; nor will a rational, or a good Man, forfeit his *Innocence*, to see what may be done for his Recovery by the Aids of *Repentance*.

IV. *Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed from this Example, lest he fall.* He cannot easily be supposed to have more Reasons for hoping well of his present Condition, than *David* had before his unhappy Lapse. Thro' a long Course of miraculous Providences he was establish'd in a flourishing Kingdom; had the Honour of near and frequent Intercourses with Heaven; was of an excellent natural Disposition, improved by large Proportions of Succour from above. Yet all these Advantages prov'd, we see, ineffectual for restraining him, and for preserving that Integrity which he was once possessed of in such an eminent Degree. Tho' his Posture seem'd erect and firm, and the Ground he stood upon smooth and even, yet, thro' Inadvertency and Want of Caution, he had a Fall which sorely bruised him; the



Pain and the Scars of it followed him to his Grave; and would not even there have left him, had not God in his tender Compassions miraculously snatched him as a Brand out of the Fire, awakened him by a Voice from Heaven into a Repentance deep and crying as his Sin, loath that a Soul so white and spotless as his, till this foul Blemish stained it, should be torn from the Hands of its Creator, too bad indeed, and too much defiled, as yet to go into them, tho' too good in the main, to fall into any other. Therefore, I say, he received a peculiar Summons to *return from whence he was fallen*; which roused and awakened him: Otherwise, 'tis highly probable, he would have gone on adding Iniquity to Iniquity, 'till all the Powers of his Virtue had been dozed and stupified in a fatal Lethargy, and all Hope precluded of his Recollection or Recovery. His Escape from the Danger at the Expence of a miraculous Interposel to save him, is no Reason to encourage our Adventure after him. But his Danger itself, with the Difficul-

ty

ty of his Escape from it, is a Reason very obvious to the best of us all, why we should *not be high-minded, but fear*. God, we may hence observe, hath no such Favourites whom he will forcibly skreen off either from Guilt or Danger. But he will see and will punish Sin in all who are bold enough to commit it. No Man's *Virtues* lay upon Providence any Obligations to guard him against destructive and wasting *Vices*, when himself is willing to depart from the one, and to embrace the other. The Rule was long ago establish'd, and God still abides by it in his Dealings with Men —

*When the Righteous turneth away from his* Ezek. xviii.  
*Righteousness, and committeth Iniquity, and* <sup>24</sup>  
*doth according to all the Abominations*  
*which the wicked Man doth; shall he live?*

*All his Righteousness which he hath done,*  
*shall not be mentioned; in his Trespass*  
*which he hath trespassed, and in his Sin*  
*which he hath sinned, in them shall he die.*

The Case here put supposeth that *righteous* Men may finally *turn away from their Righteousness*, and plainly then tells them, that they have nothing to expect but the Portion of the Wicked, Yet

V. Fifth-

V. *Fifthly* and lastly, where it is any Man's Lot to be thus plunged and endanger'd, the strongest Efforts are hence recommended to him for rising again after his Fall, and for recovering his former Posture. God doth now no longer deal with us by immediate and special Applications from above. But he hath left standing Means of Grace sufficient, if they will hearken, to reclaim and to reform the most Guilty. A *Voice from Heaven* hath once for all proclaimed the Mission of our Lord and Saviour; saying, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*: And by his Direction the whole Will of God concerning us is upon Record, and we may easily have Recourse to it. Wherefore,

If either by the Ministry of his Word, or by the Methods of his Providence, or by the Suggestions of his Spirit, or by a Resort to his Ordinances, the Sinner feels himself warmed at any Time into sober Recollection and serious Thought; let him remember it is the merciful Call of God to him, who  
would



would help and save him, would take him out of the *deep Mire* that he *sink not* ; out of the *Water-flood* which would drown him, and out of the *Pit* which otherwise would *shut her Mouth upon him*. Let him use and improve the favourable Opportunity, pursue the Thought as far as it will carry him, and embrace the Invitation he receives from it to Repentance and Holiness, and thence to Life and Immortality.

How killing will be the Reflexion he may be forced hereafter to make upon his Neglect of such precious Moments?

“ What an abandoned Wretch was I

“ (may he one Day think in the Ago-

“ nies of his raging Soul) who refused

“ the Offers of Grace and Salvation,

“ when I was invited to close with

“ them, when I was even willing to

“ embrace them, when I was just upon

“ the Point of giving into them, when

“ I was almost melted into Tears and

“ awakened into a Sense of my Guilt

“ and Danger; had not a Thing of

“ nought, a Gust of vain Pleasure, a

“ View of some paultry Gain, or some

“ empty

“ empty Honour, blown away my good  
 “ Purposes, interposed between me and  
 “ my Happiness, cast me back into the  
 “ Courses I was just forsaking, and sunk  
 “ me thus deeply, thus irretrievably in-  
 “ to the nethermost Hell ? ”

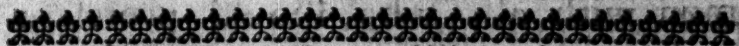
It is now in his Power to avoid the Horrors of such a tormenting Retrospect; if by a penitent Humiliation before his God, he deriyes upon himself the Comfort of his Help, and the Establishment of his free Spirit. All this will be in vain attempted, in vain hereafter wish'd for, with sad and endless Lamentations.

Now is the Time in which alone he may hope to be accepted; now only is the Day of Salvation. And God in his infinite Mercy grant that he, and we all, may in Time lay hold of it; that we may see in this our Day the Things which belong to our Peace, before they be hid from our Eyes for ever.

*Which we humbly beg of him in the Name, and for the Sake of Jesus Christ our only Mediator and Advocate.*



## SERMON XVI.



ROM. ii. 28, 29.

*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that Circumcision which is outward in the Flesh:*

*But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God.*

THE





THE great Point in View with our Apostle thro' this whole Epistle, was to remove the Prejudices of the *Jews* against the Admission of the *Gentiles* into the Church and Household of God; which implied in it the shocking Notion of throwing open their Enclosure, and laying their (hitherto peculiar) Advantages in common with all, who should profess a Desire and Willingness to partake of them.

Accordingly he smoothes his Way to them with admirable Skill and Dexterity, laying thick upon the *Gentiles* the Guilt and Stupidity of their first Departure from the living God, which provoked him to *give them up to vile Affections and to believe a Lye.*

This was a fit Monitory to the *Gentiles*, of their Debt to a gracious Providence, in calling them out of their chosen Darkness into the Light of the glorious Gospel; and at the same Time it skreened and blanch'd the Apostle's own Character

Character with the *Jews*, which stood not a little suspected by them of too much Indulgence and Partiality towards the *Gentiles*.

The Passage therefore was now more open to him for proceeding directly to the main Point in Question, and for reminding both *Jew* and *Gentile* of what was most valuable in both their Services, *viz.* a cordial and vital Sense of their Subjection to the Will of God, which in Course would put them upon all fit Endeavours to understand and to perform it; that all outward Practices not springing from this Root, were a mere dead Letter of Forms and Ordinances, utterly unprofitable, utterly unavailable to their Acceptance in the Sight of their holy Judge; that in Cases of invincible Ignorance or unavoidable Impediment, such a *Spirit* might be accepted without the *Letter*, tho' the *Letter* never would be without the *Spirit*; for, as our Apostle observes elsewhere, *the End of the Commandment is Charity out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned.* Add to this a farther Question put by him in the Context

Rom. ii.  
26.

*Context — If the Uncircumcision keep the Righteousness of the Law, shall not his Uncircumcision be counted for Circumcision?* Not that a known Ordinance of God was to be wilfully neglected; but where it was morally impossible, that Men should come at it (which had long been the Case of the Gentile World) there our Apostle intimates, that the *Effect* of it would teach them if they were true to the main Design and *Spirit* of it, which was an uniform Obedience to the Light afforded them.

Well! But *what Advantage then had a Jew? Or what Profit was there in Circumcision?* as the first Verse of the following Chapter objects to the foregoing Reasoning: Or *what Advantage* (it may be now be asked) hath a Christian, *what Profit* from his *Baptism*, upon the Foot of such catholic and extensive Principles? I answer in the Words of our Apostle (which you have in the second Verse) *Much every way: Chiefly that unto them were committed the Oracles of God; and with them, the Means of imprinting upon their Minds a deeper Sense of their Subjection to God's Authority,*



thority, of making thereby a farther Progress into the *Spirit* of true Religion, and consequently of advancing to higher Degrees of God's Favour and Approbation.

This was their Advantage, this their superior *Profit* above others, who were destitute of such happy Opportunities; whilst yet those others, by a sincere Obedience to the Law written upon their Hearts, might possibly be in a better Condition with Regard to the Favour or Displeasure of God, than they to whom his Oracles were in vain committed.

The Objection hence being thus foreclosed, as well by the plain Reason of the Case in Issue, as by the special Determination of an inspired Writer; the Moral of the Text will reach us as we are *Christians*, tho' in its original Intendment, it pointed at the *Jews*.

For it is as certain of *Christians*, as it ever was of *Jews*, that they are neither the one, nor the other, who are only so *outwardly*; that no Ordinances of the one or the other Dispensation do truly

answer the Purposes designed by them; whilst they meet with a Compliance which is *merely external*.

*Baptism* and *Circumcision* are so far upon the Level, that neither will avail *which is only outward in the Flesh*.

But it must be an inward, serious, and practical Sense of the various Obligations, under which their respective Professions severally laid, or do lay them, which could then procure Acceptance for a *Jew*, or can now obtain it for a *Christian*.

The *Heart* must be principally concerned in it; it must be in the *Spirit*, and *not* in the *Letter*; *i. e.* in the *Spirit* chiefly, in the *Letter* subordinately; the *Praise* of which, in this World of Foolery and Frailty, is not to be expected from *Men*, but *God*.

The Text thus opened will naturally enter us upon a Subject of the utmost Consequence, to all who have any good Meaning for the Interests of Religion, or for the Concerns of their own Salvation. For Example,

I. *First,*

I. *First*. We may with great Propriety and Usefulness enquire from it, wherein a truly religious Frame of Mind doth principally consist.

II. *Secondly*, We may observe from it, that this Frame of Mind, (whatever it shall appear to be) is the Cardinal Point whereupon our Acceptance turns in the Sight of God; so far, I mean, as any thing on our Parts can be judged to contribute towards it.

III. *Thirdly*, We may hence infer, that all *outward* Practices, whether of *ritual* or *moral* Righteousness, are so far only valuable, as they proceed from this Root, and build upon this as their only true and solid Foundation. To guard however against the Dreams of Enthusiasm, it may be fit to add in the

IV. *Fourth* Place, as a just and proper Explication of the Text, that tho' the *Letter* here is comparatively depreciated, as set in a Light of Opposition to the *Spirit*, yet there is a subordinate Regard remaining due to it; so that *Externals* are never to be set at nought,



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except when the Whole is placed in them, or when too much Stress is laid upon them, or when they manifestly feed and prey upon the *Intrinsic* of real Holiness.

I. Our first Enquiry from the Text will lead us to examine, wherein a truly religious Frame of Mind doth principally consist; *viz.* In a practical, awful, and lively Sense of our Dependence on the supreme Being.

This is the noble and fruitful Root, from which all the beautiful Branches of true Religion are derived; the Foundation upon which all the goodly Superstructure of real and vital Holiness is built. *Without* it, nothing can be done in Religion to any saving Purpose; there can indeed be no such Thing as Religion, tho' there may be a Pretence to it. For Religion is properly that Band or Tie, which attaches and unites us to the Author of all Things, to the Parent of universal Nature. This is the general and proper Notion of it, both of the  
*Name*



*Name and Thing.* With this every Thing will be done to the Purposes of real Piety, which the Circumstances of the Agent admit, as possible, or practical.

For a Man under this Conviction habitually attending and governing him, will be sensible that he is not his own Master, but that every Motion and Action in which he engages are subject to the Guidance of an over-ruling Power; whose Will and Pleasure concerning him, he will judge it of the highest Importance for him to know and do; so that if the Means of finding it are in any Manner open to him, his Care in this Matter will never be wanting; since an earnest Solicitude will always attract and employ Endeavour. The Operations of human Nature are uniform, where no contrary Byass warps them. And whatever we have much at Heart, will always have a suitable Influence upon the main Process of Life and Action. Wherefore if this be our prevailing Byass, if it be a leading Principle with us, that we are under the Government of an

Rom. i.  
20.

infinitely perfect Being; all proper Consequences will flow from it, as Streams do from their Fountain; all Opportunities will be embraced of recommending ourselves to the Favour and Acceptance of our mighty Sovereign. The *Law written upon our Hearts*, i.e. What natural Light discovers to us of his Will, shall be sure of finding an uniform Observance from us; for the *Invisible Things of God, even his eternal Power and Godhead*, may be easily and clearly understood by the Things which are made; as our Apostle reasons upon this Subject in the first Chapter of the Epistle; where he leaves the Persons *without Excuse*, who would take no Heed to such glaring Evidence, since there is a Provision made by natural Conscience, which reminds every Man who cometh into the World, that he came not by Chance into it; and an Attention once awake upon such an important Argument, will lead him with due Encouragement, into all just and necessary Conclusions; it will be impossible to miss them, if he be truly willing to keep

keep in Sight of them. And when he is entered upon a serious Discussion of this weighty Subject, he will find the Proposals of Revelation so very beneficial, so exceedingly useful, so perfectly and exactly suited, to the several Difficulties and Doubts in which he will feel himself entangled, upon the Foot of unassisted Enquiries, that it is utterly incredible they should fail of a thankful Reception, or of a due Improvement from him.

But if Providence hath planted him in a Soil, where these Proposals cannot come at him; our Apostle hath settled the Point for him, that having no written Law to govern him, his own Conscience (the Light which he hath) must be the Law to him, 'till a better reaches him. And if *by Nature* he *doth the Things contained in the Law*, (which the Apostle plainly puts not only as a possible Supposal, but as a Case of *Fact*) then that Conscience, which beareth Witness in his Favour, will also plead an Excuse for him, *in the Day, when* Rom. ii. *God shall judge the Secrets of Men by* Je-<sup>14, 15, 16.</sup> *sus Christ.* This *St. Paul* hath told us



was his Gospel. It is true, that under the Helps of Revelation, a Man with such a Cast of Mind and Temper would certainly make a much farther Progress, and qualify himself for much higher Degrees of his Maker's Favour, so that it must be considered as a great Misfortune and Disadvantage to him, to be destitute of the Light which the Oracles of God might afford him.

Mean while, it may be observed in passing, that the great Creator was no more obliged to put all Men upon a Foot of equal Advantages, than he was to make all his *Creatures* with like Endowments, or susceptible of equal Privileges and Favours.

Still however the religious Principle which we suppose possessing the Man in our present View, the Sense of his Dependence which we suppose, all along, prevailing with him, will qualify him for all the Advances and Improvements, which God designed for, or will ever require from him.

It is the Infelicity of the Soil wherein it is planted, no Failure nor Fault

on

on his Part, which hinders this noble Root from spreading its goodly Branches more extensively. And what is no way his Fault (we may be sure if we are sure of any thing) will never be imputed, as such to him by a righteous and holy God. For, indeed,

II. *Secondly*, This practical, awful, and lively Sense of our Dependence on the Supreme Being, attended, as we always suppose it, with its proper Consequences, is the Cardinal Point whereupon our Acceptance turns in the Sight of God; so far, I mean, as any thing on our Parts can be judged to contribute towards it.

The Service of the Heart is doubtless preferable to any other Service, and in the Truth of Things will carry along with it all other Service which is worth Acceptance. It will certainly neglect no fit or known Expression of its sincere Attachment to those Interests whereunto it is really and affectionately devoted. So that every Point which is worth securing will effectually be secured, when this Service of the Heart is once engaged in Earnest for it;  
and

and every End of Religion will be answered, when the leading Powers of the Mind are once gained over to it; every End, I mean, of Religion, which the Capacity and Condition of the Person enable him to answer: And more than this, we may be sure, as I have said, will not be required of him.

For how, I beseech you, is it conceivable, that with the forementioned Sense of Things possessing him, with an habitual and strong Persuasion, that he lives under the Inspection and Guidance of an all-seeing Providence, (how, I ask, can it be imagined possible) that he should either neglect any Means of acquainting himself with the Will of Providence concerning him, or voluntarily cross upon it, when he is once acquainted with it? If this now be not imaginable; what more, I would farther ask, can be thought *desirable* from a rational Creature, considered as in a State of Frailty? What more, however, can a merciful and gracious God demand of a Creature, whom he hath plainly vested with no farther Powers,  
and



and to whom he hath vouchsafed no better Opportunities?

Well would it be with us, if the Testimony of all our Consciences were thus favourable, if they bore witness to us, that we thus have *cleaved unto the Lord our God*; that we thus have *served him in Sincerity and in Truth, with a perfect Heart, and with a willing Mind*; that we thus have *walked before him in Uprightness, and Integrity of Heart*; that we are really possessed of that *Truth in the inward Parts* which he *desires and expects* from us: For then we are as sure as the Reason of Things and the Oracles of God can make us; that, *if there be a willing Mind, it will be accepted according to that we have, and not according to that we have not.* There is nothing of equal Moment, nothing so fit to be the great and general Condition of God's Favour to his Creatures, in a State of Frailty, as the Temper of Mind which hath been here described to you. And were our Hearts, I say, thus sound in his Statutes, we might lift up our Faces without spot, yea we might be steadfast, and  
need

*need not fear ; since the Upright have a Promise that they shall dwell in his Presence.*

But where amidst the infinite Variety of Pretenders to this Integrity, shall we find any Numbers who really stand possessed of it, Persons *without Guile, fearing God, and eschewing Evil*? The Cognisance of this Enquiry belongs to God, who alone is the Searcher of Hearts, alone can discern the secret Thoughts and Intents of them. Yet we are sure, that *all are not Children, who are of the Seed of Abraham ; nor are they all Israel, who are of Israel.* But who in particular are, or are not so, we have nothing to do to judge. I proceed however in the

III. *Third Place, to a cautionary Observation, that all outward Practices, whether of ritual or moral Righteousness, are so far only valuable, as they spring from this Root of a pure and upright Heart, and build upon it as their only true and solid Foundation. For ritual Practices ; no Man who thinks of them can ascribe any Value to them, but what*

what is subordinate to some farther View, supposed to be advanced by them. And therefore where they end in the mere external Performance, without promoting some farther Service, the *Sacrifice of Fools* is the highest Title they can put in a Claim to. 'Tis well if the *Knave* doth not often creep in under the *Fool's* Disguise, and carry on the naughty Purposes of a corrupt Heart, thro' the goodly Appearances of a formal Countenance, and the exact Punctilio's of a sanctified Deportment. 'Tis well if, where a crooked Meaning is not harboured under the Veil of demure Representations, the true Spirit of Piety be not in the Event a Sufferer from too great a Regard to them. The Man who pays it, will do well, however, to enter into a strict Examination of his own Heart, whether it stands as zealously affected towards the Duties of an higher Class; of *Sobriety, Righteousness, and Godliness*: And if it doth not, he may assure himself that there is a wrong Turn in it, that it is by no Means *upright in the Sight of God*.

Even



Even those Duties themselves of the higher Class, as exemplified to the World in *external Practice*, do not always flow from a right Principle, are not always the Products of a good Intention, nor of a *pure Conscience*. And where they are not so; they, as well as the wretched Performers of them, are but as *sounding Brass*, or as a *tinkling Cymbal*. *Bold* as the *sounding Brass*, if there be any Prospect of imposing upon God by them; *vain* as the *tinkling Cymbal*, if there be any Delight in expecting or enjoying the Praise of Men for them. The *Largess of all our Goods to feed the Poor*, and *of our Bodies to be burned for the Sake of the Gospel*, one would be apt to imagine very high and significant Expressions of our Zeal for the Glory of God, and the Good of Men. But yet we

1 Cor. xiii.  
3- know the Apostle hath put both these Cases, attended with a Supposal that the true Principle might be wanting, which alone could give any Character of Advantage, or of Usefulness, even to such exalted and shining Appearances. Other Examples after these, it were easy

fy, but not needful to lay before you, of Duties performed in a lower Way, of Monies expended, of Pleasures abstained from, of Devotions, Mortifications of various Sorts; strong perhaps and lively, tho' still mere Images of the several Virtues they would be thought to represent, whilst yet they have really neither Part nor Lot in the one Thing needful; nor is the Heart (it may be) of the Persons wearing them upright in the Sight of God. Still they may not mean his Service in any of these splendid Actions: But either the Force of Education, or the Praise of Men, or a complexional Disposition, or some present Prospect, something different from, and independent on the View of pleasing God and obeying his Will, may possibly be the Motive to their Practice.

Now tho' it should be agreed, that the mere outward Action (were it uniform and constant) might answer to a good Degree, the Reasons of Providence and the Views of its Government; yet it is certain that Virtue could have no uniform nor constant Motives

Motives to support it, if it were founded in no other Regards besides those of personal Humour, or of present Convenience. Every Man would meet with diverse Instances in Life, where such Motives would fail him; and where his Virtue would consequently be destitute of any fit Incentives to it. So that there was an evident and plain Necessity of founding the Obligations to it upon Reasons more uniform and more extensive, and of fixing the Root of it as deep as the Heart of Man. Since otherwise any Blast of Temptation, any Gust of interfering Interest or Passion, might easily dislodge or overthrow it. Yet

IV. *Fourthly* and finally, tho' the Heart of Man be of principal Account in the Service of his Maker; and the *mere Letter* of his Obedience in any possible Instance be of no Value nor Consequence; in Comparison with the *Spirit* of it; yet to guard against the Dreams of *Enthusiasm*, it is fit I should add, as a just and proper Explication of my Text; that it is very necessary to be a Christian *outwardly* as well as *inwardly*, that there is



is a subordinate Value due to *Externals*, which are never to be set at nought, except when the whole is placed in them, or when too much Stress is laid upon them, or when they manifestly feed and prey upon the *Intrinsic* of real Holiness.

The great Error of the *Jews* in our Saviour's Time was indeed *Rituality*, i. e. an excessive undue Regard to the *Ceremonial* of divine Worship. Hence we have frequent Monitories in the New Testament against a Disposition which, in Truth must be confessed, is apt in its Nature, to eat out the Vitals of true Religion.

Yet our Saviour well considering of what we are made, that we have Bodies as well as Spirits which will necessarily mix with every human Action, excluded not *Rituals* from *Christian* Worship, but only prescribed a *Measure* to them. He knew in short, what was in Man, and knew that Man could not do without them. Accordingly the Season \* upon which we are enter'd, reminds us of his own Submission to them in the Case of an Ordinance, which he came indeed to

\* Preach'd Jan. 1. on the Circumcision of our Lord.

abolish, but which, 'till abolish'd, retain'd its Title to a due Observance: As he declared throughout the whole Course of his exemplary Life, that it behoved him to fulfill all Righteousness, and to claim no Exemption from any Part of it. Yet I will not at last undertake to say, that we no where indulge too much to this Bent; no where miscalculate, nor exceed in the Value we should set upon Articles of this Kind and Nature. I will only say, that our Church in her general Aim and Purpose insists on no more than what she thinks Decency; and as far as we can trace the History of public Worship, no Evidence appears that less of this Kind was ever adopted into ancient Offices: So that if there be any where amongst us a Fault in this Matter, it is chargeable upon *particular Inclinations*, not upon our *general or established Usages*. But there is certainly also a Fault on the other Side of the Question; *viz.* a contemptuous Treatment of Forms and Ordinances, and of all Authority divine and human: I wish at last it may not appear, that the

the World in Time will come to be divided between the two great Extremes, of *idolizing* them on the one Hand, and of *vilifying* them on the other; of abandoning the Succours which it was designed we should receive from them, and of expecting more from them than they were ever meant to afford us.

As for *outward* Practices of *moral Righteousness*, the *inward* Disposition towards them is therefore so valuable, because it is the only Principle to be depended on for securing an uniform, punctual and constant Observance of them in Life and Conduct. So that the Pretence must be infinitely unreasonable and presumptuous, which boasts of the *Root* without having any *Branches* to shew for it; which talks much of the *Spirit*, and totally neglects the *Letter*; which professes *Devotion to God* without any Resort to his *Ordinances*, or *Charity to Man* without *doing Good to him* as *Opportunities* are presented. A Foundation which lies too deep in the Earth to have any known Superstructure raised upon it, is not calculated for any visible Ad-



vantage of Usefulness or Edification. Nor are the Virtues (if there could be such) of any Service in human Life, which lie so hid in the deep of the Heart, that they are never visible in external Practice. But there can in the Truth of Things be no such Virtues: For like Lights put under a *Busbel*, they will either *break thro' it*, or will be *extinguish'd by it*. So that tho' the Cognisance of the *Heart* belongs not to Man, when the Question is whether outward Actions of a fair Appearance do or do not flow from it, yet where no such Actions are visible, a rational Man can never believe, that there is in Reality any Disposition towards them. *The Tree will be known*, in this Case, *by its Fruits*; the Presumption will be, that *Faith* cannot fail of *shewing* it self in *suitable Works*; that a *wise Man*, one who is truly *endowed with Knowledge*, will *shew out of a good Conversation his Works with Meekness of Wisdom*; neither solicitous to be seen of Men, nor affectedly declining Notice, when it may prove exemplary; but above all, regarding the never-failing

ing Inspection of God his Judge, who seeth not as Man seeth, who weigheth our Actions in a Balance, and will render to every Man according to his *Deeds*.

*May the good God, who hath hitherto conducted us thro' the several Changes and Chances of this mortal Life, go on to lead us thro' the Remainder of our Course in his Fear and Favour; and to prepare us by the Discipline of Grace for the Participations of immortal Glory.*

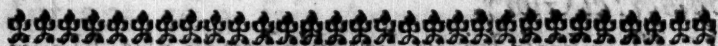
*All which let us humbly beg in the Name and Mediation of his blessed Son Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Saviour.*

*To whom be Glory and Dominion now and ever.*





## SERMON XVII.



GALATIANS i. 10.

*For do I now persuade Men or God?  
Or do I seek to please Men? For  
if I yet pleased Men, I should  
not be the Servant of Christ.*



HE Design of the *Epistle* will assist a good deal towards letting us into the just Meaning of the Text.

The *Galatians* had been lately converted by our Apostle to the Christian Faith,



Faith, and during his Absence from them had been perverted to Opinions favouring the *Mosaic* Law, and the Belief of its being still obliging to them under the Gospel State; and they who had seduced them into these Misperceptions, seem also to have insinuated, that *St. Paul* himself had given into their Notions.

Upon these Views he sets out with asserting the Authority of his Ministry, to which he tells them he was commission'd immediately from God and his *Christ*; without Dependence on any Man, or any Apostle, one of whom he reproved to his Face for too tame a Compliance with this very Error.

He farther hints to them in his Introduction at the fourth Verse, that one Design of our Saviour in giving himself for our Sins, was to *deliver us from the present evil World*; which in all Likelihood must mean the present Dispensation of the *Mosaic* Law; since our Saviour came not to *take us out of the World*, or, in that Sense of the Words, to deliver us from it; but as the Age

to come was in Scripture Language the Age of the Messias, or the Œconomy of the Gospel; so the *Age then in being* (which is the literal Translation of the Words render'd by us *this present World*) must in all Probability mean, the *Dispensation then in being* of the *Mosaic Ordinances*.

He next proceeds to express his Wonder, that they should so soon be seduced and alienated from the Doctrine he had taught them, into quite another Scheme of Principles, &c. 6. We hardly make Sense of the Words next following, when we read them as they stand in our *English Bibles*, (*which is not another*;) we should rather, I humbly conceive, give the following Turn to them; Which Removal of yours from me who converted you to the Grace of *Christ*, *into another Gospel*, *is nothing else*, or is fairly chargeable upon no other Cause, but that there are some who would confound you, and quite change the Tenour of the Gospel Œconomy. But let who will do so, be it myself, as my Adversaries would insinuate, or be it any other

ther Apostle, or even an Angel from Heaven, an Anathema is due to him.

“ Whatever I might do or be, heretofore, when I professedly followed the  
 “ Counsels of Men, and acted under the  
 “ Authority of the *Jewish Sanhedrim*;  
 “ yet surely you cannot now imagine, I  
 “ would so far desert, or betray my Trust,  
 “ as to mix any thing with my Doctrine  
 “ from a View of pleasing Man rather  
 “ than God by it. If in the Circumstances  
 “ wherein I now stand, exposed to innumerable Dangers from the whole Tenor of my Profession, I should suffer any Considerations of this Sort to prevail with me, I might e’en as well quit  
 “ Claim to my Commission, and no longer avow myself with such infinite Hazard a Servant of *Christ*.”

We read the Passage, *Do I now persuade Men, or God?* which sounds harsh; the Word render’d by us \* *Persuade*, signifies *so to persuade, as to appease, to gain the Point intended, to make court, and successful Application; to obtain, or endeavour to obtain good Will and Friendship.*

Thus we read of *David staying his* 1 Sam.  
*Servants* xxiv. 7.



*Servants with the Words* he used to them; *i. e.* the Words he used to them *persuaded* them off from their Purpose of killing *Saul*.

Mat.  
xxviii. 14.

Thus also we read the Chief Priests telling the Watch who had guarded the Body of *Jesus*, that they would undertake to *persuade the Governor, i. e.* to *pacify his Displeasure*, that he should not be angry at their Negligence in watching.

Acts xii.  
29.

And most of all to our Purpose; this very Word is render'd to *make a Friend of*; where the People of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, are said to have *made Blastus the King's Chamberlain their Friend*.

Thus, I think, you will have the full Import of my Text in the following Paraphrase.

“ Is it *now* a Time of Day for me to  
 “ make my Application and my Court  
 “ to Men, or God? Shall I make it my  
 “ Business to seek the Favour of Men?  
 “ No certainly; if I still did thus, in  
 “ vain should I profess myself a Ser-  
 “ vant of *Christ*. If I preach'd any Do-  
 “ ctrine with a View to Man-pleasing,  
 “ I might as well disclaim my Relation

to

“ to my proper Master, whom I serve  
“ with such apparent Disadvantage to  
“ my present Interests.”

*Do I now persuade Men, or God? Or  
do I seek to please Men? For if I yet plea-  
sed Men, I should not be the Servant of  
Christ; or, I would not be the Servant of  
Christ; I would not profess such an ha-  
zardous Doctrine to no manner of Pur-  
pose. The Moral of my Text thus open-  
ed is general, affects not only, the Busi-  
ness of Preaching, but of Living, reaches  
not only to the Case of any single Duty,  
but is alike extensive to all our religious  
Obligations; Since whatever proceeds up-  
on a Foot of Religion, or hath any  
Claim to its Recompence, must have a  
principal Eye of Regard to God, as the  
Creator, Preserver, and Governour of  
the World; who consequently stands  
entitled to the Homage and Obedience  
of every Being in it. No Performance  
can be acceptable to him, which carries  
not this View along with it, and is not  
spirited by it as its leading Motive.*

*To this Man-pleasing is opposed, as  
being the direct Reverse of it; and  
therefore*

therefore in considering the Nature of the *Crime*, we shall easily discover the Genius of the *Virtue*; as in exposing the Unprofitableness, Folly, and Danger of the one, we cannot miss observing the Advantage, Wisdom, and Safety of the other.

The *Nature* of the *Crime* will come first under Consideration, before we proceed to set forth the *Mischiefs* of it.

I. *First* then I would observe upon it, that all Endeavour to *please Men* is not universally to be condemned nor censured.

This is so far from being true, that *all* unnecessary Displeasure knowingly given to them is criminal, as crossing upon the Rules of human Society, and betraying too much Arrogance, as well as too much Sufficiency of Mind and Manners. All fit and lawful Condescensions are due even to the Infirmities of our Brethren; because no Man lives without his Share of Frailties; and every Man will want Allowances of some sort or other, from the Persons who have  
Intercourse



Intercourse and Commerce with him. So that there are Cases in which *every one of us* ought to *please his Neighbour for his Good to Edification*. And what ought to be done, is certainly a very just and proper View with the Persons who are to do it. Nor is even *Self* excluded from this Consideration. Since it is unquestionably conducive to the Benefit of Mankind, that every Member of the great Community should be desirous of living well with the World about him, of maintaining a fair Correspondence with other Members of the same Society, of securing to himself a just Proportion of their good Thoughts and Wishes, and therefore of behaving and acting in a Manner most likely to gain upon their Esteem and Affections. The Morose and Cynical are the only Persons who will not give into Measures so fair and equitable, and so evidently adapted to a common Interest. They love indeed the ill-natured Pleasure of being perverse and disobliging; and therefore will never think of pleasing, where they have not some View of Profit from it.

it. But this is not the true Spirit of Religion, which is mild and beneficent, gentle and well-natured, *full of Mercy and good Fruits*, yet as much without *Hypocrisy*, as the most rough and surly Barbarians. This is therefore a Disposition so far from deserving a Character of Disadvantage; that there is nothing more desirable, nothing more ornamental, nothing more serviceable to human Society, nor more necessary to the due Discharge of all relative Obligations.

But to this View of Man-pleasing, which is laudable and comely, there are divers Exceptions which render it a forbid, illiberal, and unseemly Prospect. For Example,

1. When by obsequious Compliances we injure either our selves or others. The Make of some Men is so soft and ductile, that they know not how to stand out against the wildest Proposal, which Example, Conversation, or Company can advance to them. Their Reason is so subdued to these potent Influences, that it cannot resist, or remonstrate to any practical Purpose.

The

The false Shame, and the mistaken Modesty of being singular, mislead them into Paces and Motions of the most fatal Consequence, which they pursue not from original Choice and Approbation, but merely from the Impressions of an unmanly Diffidence, and the Fear of being thought too stiff and uncompanionable. This Easiness of Nature will gradually weaken, and at last wear out all the Principles of Sobriety and Virtue; from tame and unfledg'd *Followers* of a bad Example will make them *Leaders* in it; will thus perpetuate a Succession of licentious Practices; and so, by a preposterous Misapplication of the Name and Thing, what began in Complaisance, will end in the total Destruction of all good Manners. When Virtue comes once to be flexible, 'twill soon cease to be Virtue; when it departs from its Steadiness, it yields up its best Security, and you have nothing to expect from it, when you can observe it upon the Parly, hearkning to Persuasion, and giving into the Fashion of the World. A good Soldier of Jesus Christ must neither be lured  
nor



nor frightened from off his Guard; nor Hopes nor Fears must prevail with him to quit his Post, nor to desert the Charge which Providence hath allotted to him. Let the World about him cajole, deride, or menace him; his Part in Life is assign'd him by a superior Power, and no Invitations must seduce him to betray it, or to act out of his proper Character as a rational Creature, accountable for the Trust reposed in him. There will come a Day (be sure there will) *when we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ*; and then it will be seen whether the little Intrigues or Pleasures of Life, will compensate for our Departure from the living God, and from the true Wisdom of Religion. Again

2. *Secondly*, When we court the Favour and Applause of Men by the Dawb of officious Flattery, when we paint out their Virtues to them beyond all the Proportions of real Life, and sink their grossest Faults into common Frailties, or rather leave them no Frailties to remind them of what Nature they are Partakers; this is a View of Man-pleasing,

pleasing, which every Man who hath Sense and Soul in him should be ashamed of entertaining. It is indeed the Result of a Spirit so low and groveling, that every Man who observes, despise and detests it, except the poor Idol, who, in his own Case, can be fond of it. True Wisdom and Virtue will always, even in its own (most of all in its own) Case, reject and abhor it. 'Tis indeed an Affront upon any Man's Understanding to take it for granted, that he will be pleased to be so imposed upon; as it is an Imputation upon his Morals, to imagine that he hath either Vices to be cover'd by it, the Sight of which would molest him; or Virtues which need a false-colouring, to give them an Height and Beauty not properly belonging to them.

Yet such is the Fondness and Partiality of Self-Love, that it is not ordinarily willing to look thro' this thin Disguise; much less to discourage it by those Frowns and Animadversions which would soon change its Note, and give it any Sound which the Hearer should de-

fire. The coarser Dawb will perhaps offend; but well-managed Flattery, which draws with some Resemblance, tho' always, be sure, with the very best and most heightned Likeness, is a Stratagem less apt to fail of pleasing. And yet the *Face-Flatterer* is usually found in Company with the *back and the busy Mockers*; he prides himself in acting the superior Part, in laying his Snare so well, that he finds it takes; this Pleasure would burst him, if it had no vent, and therefore the Dupe whom he hath made his own by it, must in fit Time and Place undergo the keen Satyr of his Reproaches, in Proportion to the Excess of his lavish Commendations.

But what an Abuse is this of the Privilege of Speech, and the Powers of Language! To pervert it into a Disguise of our Meaning, instead of a Discovery and a Communication of it! To fall down and worship a Man like our selves with it, and to lick the Dust of his Feet, with whom we stand upon Terms of Equality, in Regard to the main Advantages of our common Being! To call  
*Evil*



*Evil Good, and Good Evil*, in Complement and Homage to *those*, who can neither change the Nature, nor alter the Standard of Things, nor *make one Hair* for us *white or black*, nor keep our Breath or their own, within the Nostrils for one Moment longer than the Lord of Life shall permit its Continuance! Farther yet, and

3. *Thirdly*, That View of Man-pleasing should not pass without its Share of Reproach and Censure, which is attended with an undue Measure of Solicitude for the Event, and will not leave a Man easy, till all are made so, whom he Means to please. Perhaps this is not within his *Power*, perhaps 'tis unfit it should be in his *Will* to please them, by the Methods which alone can please them; perhaps 'tis not worth while to stake the Comfort and Pleasure (it may be also the Innocence) of his Life, upon the Whim and Caprice of Men not easily pleased, but very easily discontented. 'Tis too low a View for a Man of Spirit and Integrity, to steer his Motions by a Compass, which may so probably

fail him, and can never enough requite him for the Drudgery of holding the Comforts of his Life upon the precarious Tenure of what others shall say or think of him. *A good Man* may, and should be *satisfied from himself*; from a Conscience, that his Intentions are upright, and that he hath not fail'd in the Execution by any notable Mismanagement. It is acknowledged, that there is a Deference due to the Esteem of Mankind, which no Man should willingly forfeit, and no Man should profess Indifference, whether he hath, or hath not his Share in it. But there is a real and a wide Distinction between a moderate Desire, and an over-heated Anxiety. The *one* will be sufficient to spirit up all fit Endeavours; whilst the *other* will betray a Man into mean and poultry Condescensions. The *one* will consist with the *Innocence of the Dove*, and yet will mix with it a due Proportion of the *Serpent's Wisdom*; whilst the *other* will entangle a Man in all the Mazes and Perplexities of Cunning, in all the Pomp of labour'd Appearances, and with little or no proportion'd

portion'd Meaning to them, in all the dark Intrigue and Politic of Life; in all the Shifts and Subtleties of a various unsteady Conduct; in all blind Submission to the *few*, or to the *many* whose Favour he would court, without due Regard to the Measures of Truth and Justice, of Right or Wrong, of what is fit or decent, or consistent with superior and prior Obligations. Great and apparent is here the Danger, that in some of these Encounters his Integrity will contract foul Blots and Blemishes; that it will not make its Way thro' so many dark and intricate Passages without being lost, or sorely plunged in some of them. Since he who hath a Mind much bent upon *pleasing Man*, will find it unbent, in all Likelihood, when he should be *pleasing God*. Our Saviour long ago observed, that *no Man* could *serve two Masters*; for either he would *hate the one and love the other*, or else he would *hold to the one and despise the other*: But it was certain that *God and Mammon* Matt. vi. could *not* (both) be *serv'd* by him.<sup>24</sup>  
For



4. *Fourthly* and finally, the most mischievous and fatal Instance of *Man-pleasing* is, that which the 'forementioned Case is aptest to conclude in; *viz.* a *Preference of Man to God*. Let *Man*, if you will, be pleased; let all fit and sober Endeavours be laid out upon a View which will bear a good deal to be said for it, why it should be pursued and cultivated. Only let not God be postponed or neglected for any Applications, which cannot abide the Test of a Comparison. Let the *Righteousness* of his *Kingdom* be first in our Thoughts and Cares, and then let all subordinate Prospects have the Allowances which are severally due to them. Religion was intended for the Support of an uniform, consistent Scheme of Life and Action. It was never meant to disconcert the Business of the World, but to temper and to regulate those Excesses of our several Passions, which are so prone to mingle with all human Purposes, to ruffle the Order, and to discompose the Tranquillity of public as well as private Life. You may know what you have to

to depend on from a Man, who lives under the Power of its Principles; they will even *oblige*, whenever they *permit* him to be tractable and pliant; and they will always permit him to be so, *except* where the Latitude of the Allowance would produce worse Consequences, than any Restraint will under which he may happen to be laid by them. For tho' some *single Point* may be gained in Life, by a Departure from the Rules of a steady Virtue, yet the *Sum total* of Affairs will best be serv'd by an inflexible Adherence to it.

Men of strong Passions may expect to have those Passions courted; but a Man of true Wisdom will despise the mean Submissiveness of that slavish Idolizer, who can make his Reason and Religion bow down to his Interest, and can prostitute his *Lips* to the Use of a Language, which his *Heart* understands or means not. Will such a Man be true to his Engagements, or faithful to his Trust in a trying Juncture? It were wild and absurd to expect it from him! He steers, it is evident, by quite ano-

ther Compass, which will veer about with Occasions, and will lead the Man who is govern'd by it, thro' all the Windings and Turnings of a fluctuating, inconsistent Conduct.

There is nothing uniform but Principle, nothing steady but Virtue, nothing upon which any sure Dependence can be form'd but Religion. Things and Persons built or building upon any narrower Foundation, you will find upon Proof of them, to be tottering, weak and unstable; and you cannot tell what will come of them, nor what they will expect from you, nor where, nor when, nor how, their endless Demands upon you can be ever answer'd. You will find very little in them of what is intrinsically right, or good, or becoming; but only the poor Results of Caprice and Humour, of Party-Attachments and contracted Measures; of a blind Zeal for *one* Side (no Matter which) and an implicit Rage against *another*; of a resolv'd Construction, that all must in *one* Case be just what it should be, and all in *another* quite out of Course; of a fix'd and



and peremptory Persuasion, that tho' *no* sort of Men is infallible, yet *some* are never in Fact mistaken; whilst *another* Sort, tho' 'tis confessed they may have their Chances for what is just and true and fit, are never in reality so happy as to meet with it.

But what must at last become of *Truth*, when this is the Standard for it? What of real *Merit*, when so false a Test is set up for it? What of *Peace*, when the Things which make for it are neglected? What of the *Will of God*, and the Reverence due to his holy Laws, whilst the *Will of Men* stand up in Opposition to them, and the Advantages attending an *Admiration of their Persons*, are allowed to rival the proper Recompence of Virtue? Truth at last is coy, and must be courted; it is like a *goodly Pearl*, which the *Merchant-man* who would purchase must often be content to pay a round Price for it; like *Treasure hid in a Field*, which will never be discover'd, except mere Chance should lead you to it, by careless, loose and superficial Enquiries; like a *still small Voice*,  
which

Matt. xiii.  
44, 45, 46.

which will not be heard amidst the Noise of the Multitude, or the Madness of the People. In short, you must no where expect it in the Lump or Wholesale, with no *one* Man, in *every* Thing, nor with any *one* *Denomination* or Set of Men whatsoever.

The Consequence hence is not, that you should sort, or should close with *none* of them; (for then, as the Apostle speaks in a Case somewhat like the present, *ye must needs go out of the World*;) nor yet that you should stand upon a Foot of Indifference and Neutrality to *all* of them; but only that your Commerce with, your Attachment to the very *best* of them should be managed with Reserve and Distinction; that it should be regulated by those sober Measures, which alone either can or ought to oblige a reasonable and thinking Nature; that should *call no Man Master upon Earth*, but should dare to leave any Company, any Conversation, any Examples, so far as you have Reason to apprehend them wrong; that you should not be *afraid of their Terrors*, nor stand  
in

in awe of their Menaces or Reproaches, which are the impotent Effects of an undisciplin'd Will, and of an unnurtur'd Understanding: In fine, that your Regard to the *Intrinsic* of Things, should ever govern, ever over-rule, all *Extrinsic* and lower Considerations.

I am sensible I have been here anticipating, and indeed I could not help all along anticipating, what I meant originally for a distinct Head of Argument.

But the *Mischiefs* of the Practice I have been hitherto describing enter so deep into its *Nature*, cleave to it so closely and so inseparably, that I knew not well how to put asunder, what the Reason and Fact of Things had so evidently join'd together.

Little now will need to be added to what hath been already deliver'd upon this Subject.

The Instances have been noted, in which the Fault of Man-pleasing is most observable. The Consequences attending it, as we went along, have been likewise pointed to.

It



It appears upon the whole ; that Truth and Peace, Religion and Virtue, all Integrity and personal Worth, must sink in their respective Influences, proportionably as this is the View which governs our Actions.

Under the Power of these Convictions, I should ill discharge the Trust reposed in me, if the *Fear* of displeasing any Man, restrain'd me from entring upon an Argument of great Delicacy indeed in its Nature, but withal of the greatest Importance to every valuable Purpose of human Society and human Life.

Let me close with the most *serious* Application to all who hear me ; that they would seek in the first Place the Kingdom of God, and the Righteousness thereof ; that they would harbour no Views inconsistent with it ; that they would consider the Loving-Favour of Men in its due Subordination to that of God ; that they would not court it even then with too great Anxiety, lest it should unawares betray their Integrity, when they do not mean to depart from it ; that they would look upon it in its  
true

true Situation, as what is obtain'd with Difficulty and lost with Ease, what many Submissions may not gain, and what one Incompliance may forfeit.

Under these Limitations let all courteous and friendly Offices, all obliging and soft Condescensions, all mutual Forbearances and endearing Practices, be pursued and cultivated, as then they may be with Innocence and Safety. Man will thus be pleased, and God will not be provoked by them.

Thus speaking the Truth in Love, we may grow up unto him in all Things which is the Head, even *Christ*.

*To whom be Glory and Dominion now and ever.*

SERMON



## SERMON XVIII.



LUKE i. 6.

*And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blameless.*



THE usual Division of the Mosaic Law, before the Jews became subject to a foreign Power, was three-fold, and stood commonly distinguish'd into Moral, Ceremonial, and Judicial. But the judicial Part was often interrupted,  
and



and finally at length abolished, when the Sceptre and Legislature departed from them. Under this Interruption of the *Judicial* from the *Roman* Conquest of that People, two of them we find here described as righteous in the Sight of God, and consequently accepted by him, from their strict Adherence to the *Moral* and *Ceremonial*, to the *Commandments* and *Ordinances* of the Lord. These were the Parents of *John the Baptist*, the great *Elias* of the Gospel, the immediate Harbinger and Fore-runner of *Christ*. It is not to be thought, because they are represented *Blameless*, that their Obedience was *perfect* in either Kind, that they did in no Instance depart from the *Purity* of the *Moral*, or the *Letter* of the *Ceremonial* Law. This was an Height which none among the Sons of Men did ever reach, he alone excepted, who came to fulfil all Righteousness. It was sufficient to their Acceptance in the Sight of God, if in the main Bent and Purpose of their Hearts they sought to please him; if all known Breaches upon the Rule of Duty were avoided

avoided by them; if, when Surprise, Inadvertency, or even Causes more culpable had led them into any Transgression of it, they resorted to such Means of Recovery, as his *Commandments* or *Ordinances* had prescribed to them; for then, that Sin, whatever it might be, was no more imputed to them; it was covered and forgiven, and the Law took no farther Notice of it. Under this Restriction and Reserve we are to understand the good Apostle, when, speaking of himself to the *Philippians*, he saith, that *as touching the Righteousness which is in the Law* he had been blameless, *i. e.* He had been a zealous, devout, and sincere Observer of it. Thus when we find in holy Scripture the Character of *David*, as a *Man after God's own Heart*, notwithstanding great Stains and Blemishes in his Conduct, we are to consider him in a View of upright Meaning, with regard to the main Purport of his Life, and that his Stains and Blemishes were then discharged by a Repentance deep and crying as his Sins. Now as a Man may be truly pronounced

found

Phil. iii. 6.

found and healthy after his Recovery from a dangerous Sickneſs; ſo he may be pronounced *Righteous before God*, who yet hath grievouſly offended him, when his Transgreſſions are cancelled by fit Acts of Penitence and Contrition. Only it is neceſſary to the Character of ſuch Righteouſneſs, at the Time, when it is aſcribed to any Man, that he be then found *walking, i. e. living in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blameleſs*. In the Ordinances as well as the Commandments, in the Commandments, as well as in the Ordinances, in all of each, as well as in any, *blameleſs*.

This was the *Righteouſneſs* of the *Law*, which had Ordinances peculiar to itſelf; and this is now the *Righteouſneſs* of the *Gospel*, which hath alſo its Ordinances as well as its *Commandments*, tho' fewer in Number, and eaſier in the Obſervance.

In the Sequel of this Argument it ſhall be my Buſineſs to lay before you the great Qualification of an acceptable Obedience, as the Text hath repreſented it in the Character given by it to



*Zachariah and Elizabeth*; that *they were both righteous before God*; and what entitled them to that Denomination was their Walking, not in this or that Commandment only, but in *all the Commandments*; nor only in the *Commandments*, but also in the *Ordinances*, not in one or two, but in *all the Ordinances of the Lord, blameless.*

The Qualification then of an acceptable Obedience is plainly this, that the *Commandments and Ordinances* of God, have each of them an uniform Observance from us.

The *Commandments* are first in Order, and first in Dignity; for by these are understood the Duties of moral Righteousness; the great fundamental Articles of all Religion.

It was a very poor and low Degree of Proficiency, even in the *Mosaic Discipline*, to stop at *Rituals*, and stands exposed as such under the Reproof and Correction of the Prophetical Writers, but most of all, under the Rebukes of that great Prophet, who was to seal up  
 7      2      II. Vision

*Vision and Prophecy*, and set the finishing Hand of God to his several Dispensations of Grace. Now, if under an Institution, where there was so great and so professed an Indulgence to the *Ceremonial* of Religion, there was yet as avowed a Preference given to the *everlasting Righteousness* of the *Moral Law*; we may be sure the *Gospel*, which every where speaks with a comparative Diminution of the *Ritual*, means a much higher Degree of Regard to the *Moral*. So that they are without Excuse under the Christian OEconomy, who contend with Earnestness, and with great Appearances of Zeal, for this or that *Form of Words* or of Worship in it, and yet live in an habitual Neglect or Transgression of its most essential Duties, or any one of them. 'Tis as if a Man should be much concerned for his *Cloaths*, when his very *Vitals* were in Danger; or solicitous for *Ornaments* at the Point of Death; or afraid of catching *Cold* only from those *Waters* which are *drowning* him.

*Cloaths* are of undoubted Use, when

there is any thing to be *cloathed* by them; and *Ornaments* are agreeable, when there is any thing to be *adorned* by them; and a Man may with Prudence avoid even the slightest Indisposition, whilst no greater Danger is at Hand to claim his Caution.

But then every Body knows that the Estimate in these several Cases should be *Comparative*; neither *exclusive* of, nor *superior* to, what the Reason and Nature of Things have placed in an *higher* Rank.

Wherefore under my first *general* Head of *all the Commandments*, as interpreted of *Moral Righteousness*, I have two *Particulars* which I would offer to your farther Consideration;

I. *First*, The Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to *Ordinances*, without an uniform Observance of these *Commandments* also. In the

II. *Second* Place, The Inefficacy of partial Obedience even to *these Commandments*, when it is paid to one, or more only, and not to all of them.

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I. *First*, The Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to *Ordinances* without an uniform Observance of the *Moral* Law, may appear unto us under several Views; particularly the three following.

1. *First*, That no good Purpose of Providence in its Government of the World, is promoted by the greatest Punctuality in *ritual* Observances, where the *moral* Law is neglected; but quite otherwise the noblest Ends of Providence are perverted hence and frustrated.

2. *Secondly*, That no *Resemblance* to God is gained by any such Punctuality when attended with the forementioned Neglect; whilst yet a *Likeness* to God is one great *End* of all true Religion.

3. *Thirdly*, That this is a Spirit, which stood all along discountenanced even under the *Mosaic* OEconomy, and was pursued by our Saviour at the Time of his Appearance with peculiar Marks of his Dislike and Aversion.

1. *First*, I affirm, that no good Purpose of Providence in its Government of the

World is promoted by the greatest Punctuality in *ritual* Observances, where the *moral* Law is neglected; but quite otherwise the noblest Ends of Providence are perverted hence and frustrated. The *moral* Law hath apparent Uses to which it ministers, in the Order and Conduct of human Life; and was evidently enacted in the Counsels of Eternity, to make our Subsistence here more comfortable and pleasant to us; to restrain our Passions within the Compass of a sober and rational Moderity, which instead of disturbing our Peace and Tranquillity, would then become Instruments of adding the brisker Relish and Poignancy to all our Advantages. It is manifestly the Want of Temper and Government in our several Affections, which aggravates our Misfortunes, or abates our Felicities, or, upon the whole, doth intricate and perplex the present Scene to us. The View of Providence in our present Settlement was plainly, that we should live together like rational and sociable Creatures, in all the friendly Commerce of

of mutual good Offices and reciprocal Endearments: And the Practice of those Virtues which the great Law of *Morals* recommends to us, would so well adjust our Estimate of what is due *from* us, and what is due *to* us, that our Passage would be infinitely more smooth and easy to us, and most of those Interferings and Rencounters would be thence prevented, which lessen the Comforts of Society, and sour the Enjoyments of Life. The Occasion of many Sorrows to us, would hence be stopp'd at their Source and Foundation; and our Sense of others would be greatly mitigated. Our Joys would flow in upon us pure and unallay'd by any Discomposure; and the World about us, instead of throwing in Matter of Uneasiness and Disquiet to us, would be daily increasing the Measure of our Felicities, by like Regulations in *moral* Conduct. This was the State we were designed for in our present Abode; and we only miss of it, because we deviate from the Virtues which constitute it, wander after our



own Inventions, and are lost in the inextricable Mazes of Sin and Folly.

But could Mankind be persuaded to remember their original Constitution, and to labour a Return to it, they would soon perceive how much it would conduce to their Benefit and Improvement; how it would tame the Fierceness of their extravagant Desires, and reconcile the Quarrel of their jarring Interests, and cool the Ardor of their overheated Resentments; and, by qualifying the Excesses of their several Passions, would re-instate their Reason in its proper Dominion, and so restore them to that Paradise, from which the Tyranny of their usurping Lusts long ago expell'd, and ever since hath continued to exclude them. Could Mankind in general be thus persuaded, these, I say, would be the blessed Consequences. But, if this, as I doubt it is, be a vain Expectation; let any Man try for himself the hopeful Experiment, and it will amply quit the Cost to him. If he cannot bring others into his Scheme, yet if he can for himself be Master of it;  
if

if he can regulate the Disorders which he finds *within*, and adjust the Motions of his own Mind by the Rules and Measures of *moral* Wisdom; the Motions of the World *without* him, will be the less grievous to him, when they proceed not to his Liking; and he will have the more comfortable Sense of them, when they pass agreeably.

We see then hence, that there is an apparent Usefulness, and an *intrinsic Excellence* in those *Commandments*, which, when observed, would so adorn and improve our present Situation; and therefore it is a View every Way becoming the Care of Providence, to insist upon a fit Regard to such wholsom and wise Appointments.

But now this is a View, which the utmost Punctuality in *ritual Observances*, with a Neglect of those *higher Obligations*, will be so far from promoting, that it will rather defeat and frustrate that glorious End. It cannot *promote* an *End* to which the Case, as stated, supposeth it bearing no Sort of Relation. The World is not the better, nor any single Man

Man in it, for such *Forms of Godliness* as make neither the one nor the other more pure nor peaceable, as contribute neither to the Advantages of human Society, nor to the Improvement or Ornament of private Life. They derive their Value, when there is any due to them, from the Tendency they are conceived to have towards these good Purposes; from a Subserviency supposed in them to the noble *End* of tempering our Passions, and meliorating our Dispositions, and removing the Impediments of our Happiness, and taking out the Sting from our Distresses and Misfortunes. When they make no Progress for us in this gallant Discipline, they are insipid and jejune Performances, without Use or Spirit in them; Tracts, which the Wicked as well as the Good, the Ignorant and Foolish as well as the Wise and the Discerning, may walk in together with like formal Paces; tho' the Foolish and the Wicked are most likely to outstrip the Wise and Good in them, because even the greatest Nicety concerning them is consistent with all the Wickedness



edness and Folly, which were ever yet found upon the former; and the latter will seldom, if ever, value them beyond their proper Order and Proportion; and within those Regulations will never, we shall see, undervalue nor despise them. But we must needs be aware, that the Case is possible, because Experience too often verifies the Fact to us, that not only the *Hypocrite* is enabled to carry on his fraudulent and vile Designs, under the Mask and Visage of demure Pretensions, without any *real Regard*, shall I say, to *moral* Righteousness, nay even in *Defiance* of it, and in *direct Contradiction* to it; but the *Formalist* also, who is not always an *Hypocrite*, by reposing himself under the vain Shadow of sanctified Appearances and solemn Grimaces, is frequently led into a Neglect of superior Duties, becomes less careful than he should be in the Art of Self-Government; grows proud and perverse, arrogant and ill-manner'd, an implacable Enemy, or an haughty Friend; *exact* in *outward Performances*, but *regardless* of those *inward Duties* which should

should *renew* him in the Spirit of his Mind, and give an uniform Tincture to his whole Conversation.

It is, at Bottom, the Wickedness of Man's Heart which turns *Helps* into *Hindrances* and *Food* into *Poyson*; the *ritual Institutions* of God are wise and good in their Design and Tendency; but they were never meant for any Thing more or farther, than for Instruments to serve us, or for Assistances to quicken and to forward us in the Practice of all Virtue. And I mean not to pass over them, without observing the Regard which, under this View, they are entitled to. But when *Man* will *put asunder what God hath join'd together*, will rest in the *Means*, and neglect the *End*, will acknowledge his Dependence in all the elaborate Strains and solemn Forms of Devotion, and yet will be an untractable Member of human Society; indulgent to all his Passions, licentious in Speech and Practice, without any Government of his Tongue or Heart; is it, upon this State of the Case, imaginable, that his *Preciseness*, under the former  
Article

Article should be *accepted*; or his *Looseness* under the *latter tolerated*? Will it not rather heighten the Horrors of his Guilt, that he contracted it in Spight of the *Means* which were appointed to prevent it; nay made perhaps those *Means* themselves instrumental to promote it, thro' a vain Persuasion, that his Punctilio in the Use of them might serve him in the Stead of other Duties, and even compensate for the Breach of them?

The Commandments of God; those venerable Laws of *everlasting Righteousness*, have a Reverence due to them, which no Time nor Circumstance, nothing from *within* and nothing from *without* us, can ever dispense with, relax, or alter; the Reason of them is as deeply founded as the Scheme and Model of the Creation; *Eternal* as the God who enacted them, and *Immutable* as his Being, in *whom* is no *Variableness*, neither *Shadow of Turning*. In these we must be found *righteous*, or no Pretence to Righteousness will e'er a whit avail us; no Forms of Godliness, no Orthodoxy of Principles, no Regularity of Worship,  
no



no Affiduity in attending it, no Zeal for its Decency, no Exactness in its Rituals; nothing without *clean Hands and a pure Heart*, and an uniform Progress throughout the whole Circle of intrinsic and *moral* Goodness. For

2. As no good Purpose of Providence in its Government of the World is answer'd, by the greatest Punctuality in ritual Observances; so no *Resemblance to God* is gain'd by it, where the *moral* Law is neglected: Whereas the Resemblance of the *human* to the *divine* Nature, is one great *End* of all true Religion; being indeed the highest Improvement, and the greatest Perfection, whereof the *human* Nature is in any Manner capable. Now it is Obedience to the Precepts of *moral* Goodness, which, the most of any Thing, likens us to God. He is an immaculate Spirit, and of *purser Eyes than to behold Iniquity*, without the deepest Abhorrence of it. But tho' our Composition be of Flesh and Spirit, and we *dwell in Houses of Clay whose Foundation is in the Dust*, whilst his Being is simple and uncompounded, and his *Habitation*

*bitation is in Holiness and Glory; yet even here it is expected from us that we should copy what we may from his glorious Original, that we should endeavour to exalt our Make, and refine the Dross of it, and spiritualize our leading Dispositions, and cleanse our selves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God.* <sup>2 Cor. vii. 1.</sup>

Again, God is just and righteous, excellent in Judgment and in Plenty of Justice; <sup>Job xxxvii. 23.</sup> and hath accordingly declared even under the Mosaic Economy where Rituals had more Force than any where, that to do Justice and Judgment is more acceptable to him than Sacrifice. He is the faithful God, and keepeth Truth for ever; and therefore lying Lips are his Abomination, <sup>Prov. xii. 22.</sup> but they who deal truly are his Delight. He is good and doth good; and his tender Mercies are over all his Works; and therefore, as we have Opportunity, we should do good <sup>Gal. vi. 10.</sup> to all Men; since with Sacrifices of that Sort he hath avowed himself well-pleased. He is Long-suffering and full of Compassion, <sup>Psal. lxxxvi. 15.</sup> slow to Anger, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repen- <sup>Joel ii. 13.</sup> tance.

*tance; and therefore we, as the Elect of God (and hoping to be beloved of him) 2 Pet. iii. 9. should put on Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Coloss. iii. Meekness, Long-suffering; forbearing one 12, 13. another and forgiving one another, if any Man hath a Quarrel against any, even as Ephes. iv. God for Christ's Sake hath forgiven us. 32. Finally, as he is glorious in Holiness, he expects we should be holy in all Manner of Conversation.*

Thus we see the near Affinity and Conjunction which there is between Obedience to these moral Commandments of God, and Likeness to his Nature; and may hence admire the Wisdom of his Providence in the original Draught of the Creation, and in so contriving the Circumstances of our present Abode; that the Virtues which are most necessary to our well-being here, and to our comfortable Subsistence in the *Life which now is*, should at the same Time dispose and train us up for that better State which we are design'd for *hereafter*, and for the *Life as yet hid with Christ in God*. For it is our present Resemblance to him, which must qualify us for our future Enjoyment of



of him. Them who are *his*, he will *know* by no other Badge or Cognifance, than by this *Likeness* of Nature and Disposition. So that there can be nothing in Religion of equal Importance to us with the Attainment of those Habits and Manners, which by the renewing of our Minds, and the Sanctification of all our Powers, may transform us into his sacred Image, and stamp upon the Persons of the *Children*, the Features and Lineaments of their great *Parent*. But now this is a View which can no otherwise be served, than by our Conformity to the several Precepts of *moral* Duty; and by such gradual Advances and Improvements in them, as may enable us to *abound yet more and more in all Virtue*, and so may work up this *divine Likeness* in us to greater Heights of Purity and Perfection; till at length *with open Face beholding as in a Glass the Glory of the Lord, we be changed into the same Image from Glory to Glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*. Little will be gain'd to this great Purpose, by any Measures of Exactness in Forms and Ordinances, or

in all the Rituals of Religion; where they are allowed to stand out of their proper Course with us, and are not pinned down to that subordinate Rank, which the Reason of Things and the Oracles of God have jointly assign'd to them. An *over-proportion'd* Value of them is apt, I rather suspect, to stint and to retard that *Growth in Grace*, and that Improvement in the *moral* Lessons of the Gospel, which it was the Design of their Institution to promote and cultivate. Mistake me not, as if I meant to disparage in any Manner the *Externals* of Religion, the Merit of which shall have its due Estimate, before I take Leave of my present Subject.

God hath call'd us to Holiness by Means very fit in themselves to *nourish* and increase it. But that which was intended for the *Food* of Holiness, thro' the Mischief of a bad Digestion may possibly become the *Bane* of it. And so these Means will doubtless prove, whenever they lead not to their proper *End*, but are made to serve *instead* of it.

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Thus when *Ordinances* juggle out *Com-  
mandments*, and *Rituals* interfere with  
*Morals*, they act the very Reverse of the  
Part design'd for them, and fly in the  
Face of that sacred Authority, by which  
alone they are entituled to any Regard  
from us. And therefore we may ob-  
serve in the

3. *Third* and last Place, upon the Par-  
ticular now before us, that this was a  
Spirit all along discountenanced, even  
under the *Mosaic Economy*, and was  
pursued by our Saviour, at the Time of  
his Appearance, with peculiar Marks of  
Dislike and Aversion.

The *prophetical* Writings are to be  
consider'd by us, as *equitable* Com-  
ments upon the *Letter* of the *Levitical*  
Law; and as authentic *Explanations*  
of it.

And they have sufficiently spoken to  
our present Point. To what Purpose

(saith God by his Prophet) *is the Mul-  
titude of your Sacrifices unto me? I am  
full of the Burnt Offerings of Rams, and  
the Fat of fed Beasts; and I delight not  
in the Blood of Bulls or of Lambs, or of*

Isai. i.

11-18.

8



*He-Goats.* When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your Hands, to tread my Courts? Bring no more vain Oblations, Incense is an Abomination unto me; the new Moons and Sabaoths, the Calling of Assemblies I cannot away with, it is Iniquity, even the solemn Meeting. Yet after all, each of these Particulars was in Fact required from them; but then they were all required in the subordinate Rank of Duties, which those of an higher Class were never meant to veil to. And the Process of the Expostulation shews us where it pointed. *Wash ye* (saith God) *make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow.* Or, as another Prophet hath expressed the Demands of God upon the same People, the Sum of what he required from them, was *to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.* Of all their Service, this was the most acceptable.

Micah-vi.  
8.

In

In our Saviour's Time, the *Pharisees* had quite inverted the natural Order of religious Duties, and set up the *Positive* in Opposition to the *Moral*: The *Tithing of Mint and Anise and Cummin*, whilst *Judgment and Mercy* were neglected by them. And the whole Tenor of his Converse with them may help to convince us, that no People were more than they the Objects of his keen Indignation. He charges them (in one great Instance of moral Duty) with *making the Command of God of none Effect by their Tradition*; with *drawing nigh to him with their Mouths, and honouring him with their Lips, when their Hearts were far from him*; with *making long Prayers, whilst they were devouring Widows Houses*; with *straining at a Knot and swallowing a Camel*; in fine, with all the Absurdity, Self-Contradiction, and Hypocrisy which must ever cleave to the Character of those, either Fools or Serpents, who appear outwardly righteous unto Men, but within are full of Iniquity.

Matt. xv.  
6-8.

Matt. xxiii.  
14-28.

Let the Considerations which have been here suggested, prevail with you

to give no Occasion of Offense in any of these Things, lest thro' your Means the Institutions of God be blasphemed, and the Ministrations of the Gospel, exposed either to the Insolence of the Scorners, or to the Cavils of the vain Enthusiast. The Formalist gives *them* their great Advantage. Were *he* more consistent, and would he fix the Duties of Religion upon a more defensible Bottom, the Ministry could not so be blamed as it is, nor Sacraments represented so vile and so contemptible. The Means of Religion moving always in a confessed Subordination to its noble End, would place the whole of it in a Light so clear and amiable, that as Reason would start no Objection, so Malice it self would hardly find an Handle of Reproach against it. But *speaking the Truth in Love, we should grow up unto him in all Things, which is the Head, even Christ.*

You may remember, that I propounded at my Entrance upon this Discourse, to consider the Nature of that Righteousness which the Text hath ascribed to the Persons commended by it; viz. an uniform



*uniform Obedience to all the Commandments and Ordinances of God. That*

The *Commandments* being first in Order, and first in Dignity; I offer'd two Particulars thereupon to your farther Consideration.

*First*, The Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to *Ordinances*, without an uniform Observance of the *Commandments* also; which is the only Point I have been able at this Time to finish.

The *Second* was the Insufficiency of a *partial* Obedience even to these Commandments, when it is paid to one or more only, and not to *all* of them. But this, with what remains of the Subject, must be reserv'd to a farther Opportunity.





## SERMON XIX.



LUKE i. 6.

*And they were both righteous before  
God, walking in all the Command-  
ments and Ordinances of the Lord  
blameless.*



T my Entrance upon the  
Argument which the Text  
hath started, I propounded  
to consider from it, the  
great Qualification of an  
acceptable Obedience; or what it is,  
which will be sure to make us Righte-  
ous

ous before God, as the Persons here spoken of are said to have been: Now the Reason of their being so accounted was their walking in *all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blameless. i. e.* They were *blameless* in the main Bent of their Dispositions, and in the Tenor of their Actions; and if in any Point they miscarried, they retrieved the Consequence of proper Measures of Humiliation and Repentance.

This was the *legal Righteousness* of the *Mosaic OEconomy*, viz. an uniform Obedience to *all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord*, as they were then circumstantiated; and the same Obedience to *all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord*, as they are now circumstantiated by his blessed Gospel, is the proper Notion of *Evangelical Righteousness*.

For the Will of God, howsoever known to us, is our Rule of Duty; and therefore if the Law of Reason hath instructed us in the Lessons of his *moral Commandments*, or if Revelation hath improved these Lessons for us, and super-added



added a farther Directory of Forms and *Ordinances*, and of ritual Appointments; the Compass of our Obligations will then extend as far and widely as the Compass of these several Injunctions; and both the *Commandments* and *Ordinances* of God must have a due Observance from us.

But as the *Commandments* of God are interpreted in a *moral*, and his *Ordinances* in a *ceremonial* Meaning, my last Discourse was intended to convince you of the Preference due to the *Moral* before the *Ceremonial*, to the *Commandments* before the *Ordinances*; tho' a just Regard to *both* is necessary.

Accordingly I propounded to consider these two Particulars.

I. *First*, The Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to *Ordinances*, without an uniform Observance to the *Commandments* also. In the

II. *Second* Place, The Inefficacy of a partial Obedience, even to these *Commandments*, when it is paid to one or more only, and not to *all* of them.

In

In the Discussion of the first Particular I reminded you,

1. That no good Purpose of Providence in its Government of the World could be answered by the greatest Punctuality in *ritual* Observances, where the *moral Law* should be neglected; but quite otherwise, that the noblest Ends of Providence would be perverted thence and frustrated.

2. That no Resemblance to God could be gained by any such *Punctuality*, when attended with the forementioned *Neglect*; whilst yet a Likeness to God is one great End of all true Religion.

3. That this is a Spirit which stood all along discountenanced, even under the *Mosaic* OEconomy, and was pursued by our Saviour at the Time of his Appearance, with peculiar Marks of his Dislike and Aversion.

Indeed there is *here* the common Mischief, which is usually attending upon all *Extremes*, that the *golden Medium* is slighted by both of them; in which at last all true Virtue and Goodness will be found consisting.

Thus

Thus the *Enthusiast*, who is a professed *Despiser* of *Rituals*, gives an Handle to the *Lover* of them for being *more* in Love with them, and for preferring them to the Duties of a superior Value. He is sure the *Enthusiast* is wrong in such an utter Contempt of them; because they have in *general* the Reason of Things to give them some Countenance; and they have in *particular* a just Authority, which demands some Regard to them: And therefore where none is paid to them, the *Formalist*, who hath them too much at Heart, will be sure to load his Adversary, not only with the Reproaches due to him, but perhaps to exceed in the Measure of them, and in the Career of his Opposition, to push beyond the Point, where he should make his Stand. Mean-while the *Enthusiast* will not be behind Hand in taking any Advantages which the other gives him; but will be as apt as he to over-strain in the Heat of his Contradiction: And therefore whilst his Adversary unwarrantably indulges the Ceremonial



removal of Religion, he, in his Turn, will as indefensibly *relax* it; neither enough considering, that as true Religion doth not *consist in Externals*, so it will not *subsist without* them.

All the *reasonable Claims* of the *Enthusiast* have already been allow'd to him in the Preference which hath been given to the *moral Commandments* of God before his *ritual Ordinances*.

His *ritual Ordinances* will have Justice done to them in the Sequel of the Comparison, when the *Enthusiast's* avow'd Neglect of them will appear, I presume, to have no tolerable Foundation in human Nature, or in common Sense.

But before we can properly come at the Liquidation of this Particular, the Method I have propounded will require us to consider a farther Remark upon the *Commandments* of God, which yet remains to be discussed by us, *viz.*

II. The *Inefficacy* of a *partial Obedience* to them, when it is paid to *one* or *more* only, and not to *all* of them. For

The Persons represented by the Text  
as

as *righteous before God*, walked not only in *this or that* of his *Commandments*, but in *all* of them, or else they had not been blameless. Here again the Corruption of our Hearts, is as apt to deceive, and to mislead us, as in the forementioned Case. In *most* Men there is some Sense of an Obligation to observe, and to obey, the *Commandments* of God. But then there is in the same Persons, a Propensity and an Inclination to depart, in some Instance or other, from the Tenor of this Obligation. For example, *The Voluptuary* will easily quit the Views of the *Ambitious*, and leave him in the Possession or the Pursuit of the Honours he aspires to without contesting a Point with him, to which his *Heart* hath no Attachment nor Devotion; nor will the *Deceitfulnesses of Riches* entangle his Affections, who hath a Mind more set upon *spending* than *amassing* them together in an useless Hoard. But the *Sin* which *most* easily besets him shall still retain its Hold of him, and shall retain it the faster, because in those other Articles of Transgression his Conscience

Science may *plead not Guilty*; and he can observe and censure the Conduct of his Neighbours, who perhaps are blameable in the Points whereof himself is innocent. He hath, we will suppose for him, many specious Shews of Virtue which much endear him to the World about him; such as a flowing Courtesy, a generous Condescension, a Readiness to do kind Offices, with great Appearances of good Will to all Men. All this is possible, and often the Case in Fact. But let the Bait be laid for him which suits his Taste and Liking, let a Temptation be presented which gratifies his leading Passion, and it will immediately be seen that his Virtue will give Way to it, that he proceeds not upon Principle, but is govern'd by Appetite and Inclination.

Give me Leave upon this Occasion to offer some Reasons, why such a Measure of Obedience should not be accepted from us, why we are to walk in *all*, as well as in *any* of God's Commandments.

I. Because the same sacred Authority



is stamp'd upon *all* which is upon *any one* of them. This is *St. James's* Argument upon the Subject. *He that said, Do not commit Adultery, said also, Do not kill: Now if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the whole Law.* Have we then any real Reverence for the Will of our Maker? *That* is notify'd to us in one Instance of Obedience as well as in another; in the *personal* and *private*, as well as in the *social* and *relative* Duties of Life; in the Articles of *Righteousness* and *Sobriety*, as well as of *Piety* and *Godliness*. So that to pick and chuse for ourselves which Link we will *break*, and which we will *keep* in the Chain of Virtues, is not to follow the *Guidance of God's Counsel*, but the Whim and Caprice of our own Humour and Fancy. Now there can at last be no Security for our Obedience to any of God's Commandments, where *his Authority* is not the leading Motive to it. Suppose our *Taste* or our Convenience the Inducements which prevail with us; Time may alter that *Taste*, and even quite reverse it; and then

then the opposite Vice must have the same Indulgence, which happens to be the present Lot of its contrary Virtue; and thus our Principles shall vary with the Change of our Complexions. Or suppose our Virtues founded in *Convenience*, that we are temperate merely for the sake of Health; or *righteous* in the Sight of Men, that we may gain their Applause: Who sees not here, that Circumstances may be quite alter'd? That we may offend in the Article of Indulgence to our Appetites and Passions, with all Safety to our Constitution; and advance to great Lengths of Injustice and Fraud, without any Danger of a Discovery? And where is then the Motive, which should restrain us? But now the *Authority* of God is a Consideration, which at *all* Times, and in *all* imaginable Variety of Circumstances will be ever present, and ever persuasive to us. It is an uniform, universal Principle, of like Force and Efficacy in all the Instances of Duty, and where it operates

any where, will have a *general* Operation.

For if either the *Love* or the *Fear* of him produces in us a Regard to his Pleasure; the Notification of such his Pleasure will be the decisive Point with us, and the Master-Spring of all our Actions. If we *do his Will*, and not our *own*, the whole Round of Virtues will have a like Observance from us; because he is alike concerned for *all* as he is for *any* of them. So that there can be no Pretence of Service meant to him, which is only *partial*, or which fixes upon some favourite Duty, exclusive of any Branch belonging to it, wherein to pay him the Tribute of Obedience. And where the Service is not *meant* to him, we have seen it will be paid with no Exactness nor Punctuality; nor will even the Favourite Instance in which we chuse at *one* Time to pay it, be at *all* Times, perhaps, agreeable to our Taste and Liking, *then* will in course be dropped; and so the poorest and lowest  
Pittance



Pittance of Obedience will no longer be obtain'd of us. Wherefore

It was necessary, that our Obligation to the Laws of God should be fixed upon a more extensive Principle; such as might reach us at all Times, in all Circumstances, and in all the Branches of the Duty required from us. Now the sacred Impress of his *Authority*, is a Consideration of this extensive Nature; it stands equally opposed to the whole Catalogue of Sins; admits no Exception, gives out no License, but takes in the full Compass of all Goodness and of all Virtue. Again,

2. *Secondly*, The intrinsic Reason of all God's Commandments is the same with the intrinsic Reason of *any*; and therefore *all* as well as *any*, have a Claim upon our Obedience. This in general is the Peace and good Government of human Society by a just Regard to all *relative Obligations*; together with the Improvement and Ornament of private Life, by a due Cultivation of all *personal Virtues*. Let *Self* have too much

Indulgence, and it cannot well be, but that others must suffer from it; or, if that Consequence were avoidable, which it rarely is, yet the Fondling would himself be worsted by the Excess and Mismatch of his own Demands. But there is indeed such a mutual Alliance between all the Offices of moral Duty, that a Breach in any one of them, affects the rest, which lie next in Order to it, and enfeebles the whole Constitution of the Soul. The Man who is too bold with the personal Virtues of Meekness or Content, will naturally prove a perverse or encroaching Neighbour: As he who gives a Loose to his Passions, or flings up the Reins of Temperance and Sobriety, lets a wild Boar into the Vineyard next him, which will ravage and devour every Thing before him; or if no such Mischief comes of it, no Thanks, however, are due to his Caution or his Care, who broke up the Enclosure, and exposed both himself and all within his Reach, to the Mercy of  
Rage

Rage without Reason, and of Passion without Controul or Government.

Let the Instance fix where you will, some *natural Evil* will ever attend the *moral*; some ugly Consequence will always cleave to a Departure from the Rule of God's *Commandments*. This is founded in the Constitution of Things, as the Wisdom of Providence hath contrived and ordered them. To break in upon the Measures of Right and Wrong, must and will disconcert the Peace and Happiness of human Society; and the larger any Man is in selfish Demands or Cravings, the less he will allow to the Claims of others; and the more forgetful he is of his Dependence on the God who made and preserves him, the less Guard he will have upon his whole Behaviour, the less Check upon his Lusts and Appetites, and the less Value for his Brethren, when their common Parentage is never thought of. And yet perhaps this very Man shall be vain, as the vainest, in his own Imaginations, from some Appearances of



Virtue worn by him In the Article of Sobriety, and in the Government of some particular Passion, he is strict perhaps and regular; his Constitution, it may be, will not bear Excesses, or his Inclination may not favour them; but then he shall wrap himself up in Sourness and Stiffness, in Surlinefs and Moroseness, in Perverseness and Censoriousness, and in all the scurvy Marks of an unfriendly Disposition. Or suppose the Reverse of this; that with all the amiable Turns of a frank and sociable Temper, he runs Riot in Sensuality, and in vicious Indulgences; this is still an Offence against the Reason of Things, and an unwarrantable Exception to the Rule of Duty. His Mind is *carnalized* by it, which should be *spiritualized*; the Powers of his *Soul*, as well as of his *Body*, are soil'd, impair'd, and enfeebled by it, which should be preserved, improved, and brightened; and wherever he draws in Partners to his Guilt, Human Society becomes so much the worse for him, and with all his

his Regards to Honour and Justice, he will not scruple to sacrifice them, when they stand between him and his beloved Enjoyments. But where at last is the Uniformity or the Consistency of such a Conduct? Is the *intrinsic Reason* of *Virtue* the Motive to him for discharging *some* of its various Offices? Why then should it not be alike prevailing with him, for the Discharge of *others*, and indeed of *all*? For *all* have this *intrinsic Reason* essentially and inseparably cleaving to them; *all* are founded in wise and weighty Regards; *all* were form'd and modell'd in the Counsels of Eternity; *before the Mountains were brought forth, or even the Earth and the World were made*, they were with God *from everlasting*, interwoven with the original Scheme of the Creation, and impossible to be left out of it, without a Reverse of the Whole, and a fresh unimaginable Draught of Things, upon new and unknown Foundations. So that it cannot be Reason, it cannot be Religion, it cannot be a

Reverence for God's Authority, it cannot be Principle of any Sort, it can indeed be nothing but Caprice and Humour, Whim and Fancy, which shall induce a Man to walk in *some* of God's Commandments, and to leave *others* behind him without any Regard to them. For they have all the same *Reason*, the same *Authority*, and I add in the

3. *Third* and last Place, that they have all the same *Sanctions* also. He who said, *Do not commit Adultery*, not only said, *Do not kill*; but hath pronounced upon *both* a Sentence of Condemnation. They are both Transgressions of the Law, and shall be judged as such. One capital Offence is fatal. And tho' the Place of Torment, wherever it be, may admit Degrees in it, and the deepest Measures of Guilt shall indubitably have the deepest Measures of Punishment assign'd to it; yet even the *lowest* Degree of it implies an everlasting Separation from the blisful Presence of God, an everlasting Abode in a State of Gloominess and Horror, and is represented under Characters too  
dreadful



dreadful to be encounter'd, for any Consideration which the most inviting Promises of Sin can give us. Is it then any *single Sin, which the most easily besets us?* The more *easy*, one would think, it might be to get rid of it, for its being *single*. A *Legion*, surely, were far more formidable. If we cannot enter the Lists with *one* Enemy, how shall we behave when *Numbers* assault us with *united Strength*? But now to forfeit our Interest in God, and in that Recompence of Reward to which our other Virtues might entitle us, for the Sake of any *one* Indulgence; to miss the *Prize of our high Calling*, and to stop short of the Goal, when we have but *one* push more to make for it, were a Degree of Sluggishness and Folly, to which amidst all the Absurdities of Vice there can scarce be found a Parallel. To mount so high in the Scale of Virtue, as to have the last Round in View, then to faint and give out, when we are just at the Top, because the *last* Pace requires somewhat of a larger Stretch, and by that Relaxa-  
tion

tion of our Endeavours to fall quite back, and to lose the Fruits of our past Labour and Struggle, is such wild Inconsistency in reasonable Creatures, that one would think it should be a Bar to their Claim of Rationality. Yet this is in effect their Conduct, who break in upon the Circle of Obedience by any single Transgression of the *moral* Law; which in all its Parts and Branches is their reasonable Service; and if against this any one Man were allow'd to make for himself his favourite Exception, *another* might with equal Right demand the same Privilege, and so the whole Law would be broken by Piece-meals, and by a confused Variety of particular Relaxations.

Thus we have at large consider'd the Necessity of walking in the *Commandments* of God, as interpreted of *moral* Duties; upon which we have observed,

I. The Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to *Ordinances*, as taken for *ritual Appointments*, without an uniform Obedience to these *Commandments* also:  
And in the

II. Se-

II. *Second Place*, the Inefficacy of a *partial* Obedience even to these *Commandments*, when it is paid to *one* or *more* only, and not to *all* of them.

It is yet incumbent on us to consider the Necessity of walking in the *Ordinances*, as well as the *Commandments* of God, in order to be *righteous* before him, and *blameless* in his Sight.

And that this Part of the Argument may have Justice done it, we will take it in the same Point of View, which we took the former in; and therefore will observe

I. The Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to the *Commandments* of God, without an uniform Regard to his *Ordinances* also; and in the

II. *Second Place*, the Inefficacy of a *partial* Regard to these *Ordinances*, when it is paid to one or more only, and not to all of them.

But before we proceed to the Discussion of the two foremention'd *Particulars*,



lars, it will be fit we should consider the Necessity of *Ordinances* in general; how suitable they are, and have always been to our Make and Constitution, and how impossible it hath been ever found for Religion to subsist without them. If History may be credited; the most ancient and sacred of all Histories informs us, that even before the Fall, even in a State of Innocence, whilst our Nature was unimpaired, and our Reason shone out with its fullest Lustre in the Persons of our two great Ancestors, even *they* were subject to a positive *Ordinance*, the Breach of which was solemnly vindicated by an Entail of Woe upon all succeeding Generations. The *Patriarchal* State was not left (we are sure) to subsist upon mere *Morality*; but diverse *Ordinances* were appointed under it, and afterwards adopted into the *Jewish Ritual*; before which we read of *Altars and Oyl, and Drink-Offerings*, as used in Divine Worship; the *Sign of Circumcision* prescribed to *Abraham*; Offerings and Sacrifices presented to God long before

Gen. xxxv.

14.

Gen. xvii.

10.

Gen. iv.

3, 4.

*before* the Flood, as well as *after* it. And as soon as the Memory was lost of God's Institutions, human Nature *went* Gen. viii. *a Whoring after its own Inventions*; <sup>20.</sup> which is the just Account of that prevailing Superstition and Idolatry, wherewith the World was over-run in some of its earliest Ages. The *sensitive* Part of human Nature hath ever been too hard in Fact for the *rational*; and therefore where the *former* hath had no stated Indulgences, it hath encroach'd upon the *latter*, with the more fatal Advances. Observe whether the Truth of Things doth not correspond to a Tittle with this Observation. Some Prescriptions of this Sort the Patriarchs had, and they who stopped there, and kept within the Enclosure of God's *Ordinances*, enjoy'd the Continuance of his Favour, and such Measures of Revelation from him, as their Circumstances from Time to Time represented expedient for them. Meanwhile, the rest of the World, as they departed from the *Rituals* of *divine Institution*, run Riot into all the Extravagances of  
of

of *human Fancy*: Whereupon it grew necessary to make some farther Allowances for this prevailing Bent, and to guard at the same Time against all arbitrary Indulgence to it. Upon Views of this Sort the *Jewish Ceremonial* seems to have been *instituted*. Look at the rest of Mankind, and you will find them over-run with all the Excess and Barbarism of the most monstrous Usages in religious Worship. Even the *Jews* themselves, tho' tied down to the strictest Letter of *ritual* Observances, were preserv'd with great Difficulty, (when at all preserv'd) from farther undue Excursions; and when a long Captivity had reclaimed them from *that* Error, the *Form* of it was only varied, but the *Substance* of it continued with them, in the utmost Nicety of Regard to *Ordinances*, which employ'd indeed all their Study and all their Learning in the Resolution of the minutest Cases and Questions relating to them.

This was the State of Mankind, both of *Jew* and *Gentile*, when the Gospel  
was



was propounded to them. The whole Series of Facts, from the Creation down to that Period, is sufficient Evidence that there was ever a Principle in human Nature, which would not be satisfied without some *Form of Godliness*. And indeed the very Frame and Composition of our Beings may serve to convince us, that as our *Bodies* are the *Temples* of God, and our *Spirits* yet nearer and more immediately akin to him, it must be very fit for us to *glorify* him in *both*: And tho' upon the Christian Scheme, the most proper Worship of him is represented as that which is paid to him in *Spirit and in Truth*; and much accordingly of the *Jewish Ritual* is abolish'd by it, (as it was then indeed high Time to cure a Bent which had exceeded all the Boundaries of Mediocrity and common Sense;) yet our Saviour, who knew full well *what was in Man*, remember'd what was fit for him; that he was not yet qualified for the *Food of Angels*, nor for the perfect Simplicity of a mere spiritual, uncompounded Service; and therefore

fore, sufficiently intimating that the *Moral* of Religion was his primary Care, he neglected not however to fix upon some *Rituals*; and wherever he left the Case undecided, his earliest Followers who moved for some Ages under the Guidance of his Spirit, were particularly solicitous to *set in Order the Things which were wanting*, and hand down to Posterity what they had received from their Fathers. Thus we have a Scheme of Christian Worship and Discipline, deliver'd in general Hints to us by the inspired Pen-Men of the New-Testament, and more at large explain'd to us by the successive Writings and Practices of the earliest and purest Ages in the Christian Church: And

Thus if *general universal Fact* may be allowed to prove a *general universal Bent*, we have the undoubted Concurrence of the *former* to vouch *as* undoubted a Disposition in human Nature to the *latter*. What then could the Gospel do, finding in us all this *ritual* Propensity? To have quite discouraged it, had enter'd

ter'd us upon a Scheme never yet attempted, and therefore in all Likelihood utterly unfit for us. It rather seems to have been the View of our great Lawgiver, to bring us back to the *Patriarchal* State of Religion, which had in it somewhat, tho' not a great deal of the *Ceremonial* mix'd with it; as we are sure, that the *Moral* was its chief Intention.

But *Ordinances* still, as they have always been, are entituled to a proper Measure of Observance from us; and our Nature seems to have ever favour'd them with so strong a Byass of Inclination, that a *total Cure* of it, without some *Indulgence* towards it, never yet appears to have been within the View of Providence: Let those who are better acquainted with our Make and Constitution than the Author of our Being is, improve, if they can, upon his Scheme and Workmanship; and find out for us an *Utopian* Religion, adapted to their own peculiar Speculations.

For our selves, let us *have*, or, as the  
 Vol. II. K k Word



Heb. xii.  
28.

Word there signifies, let us *hold fast* that *Grace* which the *Gospel hath revealed* to us, whereby we may *serve* him *acceptably with Reverence and godly Fear*.

Two Particulars do yet remain to be discussed upon this second general Head of my Discourse, which having so lately mention'd, I will not now repeat to you, but shall reserve the farther Consideration of them for the next Opportunity.



SERMON



## SERMON XX.



LUKE i. 6.

*And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blameless.*



THE Commandments of God, consider'd as the great Articles of the Moral Law; the Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to Ordinances, without an uniform Obedience to

K k 2

the

the *Commandments* also, and the *Inefficacy* of a *partial* Obedience even to these *Commandments* themselves, when paid to *one* or *more* only, and not to *all* of them, are Points which have been already debated in two former Discourses. In the Close of my last I propounded to consider the Case of *Ordinances*, the Necessity of them in *general*, their known Agreeableness to the Make and Bent of our Constitution, and the constant Resort which hath ever been to them under all the Forms and Faces of Religion, under the *Patriarchal*, *Jewish*, and *Christian* Dispensations, even in *Paradise* itself, as well as *out* of it, *before* the Flood and *after* it, and under all the Varieties of *gentile* Superstition. Now I thought it a just Conclusion from these Premises, that a *Fact* so *general* and *universal*, must have a *Reason* as *general* and *universal* for it; which could be no other than a Bent in our Nature, ever demanding, ever insisting upon some Indulgence to *ritual* Usages, and to *sensible* Forms of *Worship*. The Consequence of which  
hath



hath always been, that where Mankind have found no stated *Ceremonial* fix'd and appointed for them, they have sought one for themselves and given in to all the wild and confused Diversity of their *own Inventions*.

The Restraint of them from these undue Excursions, seems to have been a good deal the Reason and Foundation of the *Jewish* Establishment, upon the growing Corruptions in the *Patriarchal* State, and their Declensions from the Purity of that Worship which had obtain'd in it.

The *Gospel* Scheme seems in a great Measure calculated for reviving the *Patriarchal*; only with some Change in the Forms and Ordinances of the latter, which was intended to perpetuate the Memory of its own most signal Occurrences; and with some farther Provision than was made before, for notifying to the World the Pleasure of its Maker; the Knowledge of which could not spread far, nor long subsist upon the Foot, or with the Help of mere *oral Tradition*.

We have therefore now a *surer Word of Prophecy to take heed to*, convey'd to us in a written Directory, for the Regulation of our Faith and Practice, handed to the World by an unquestionable Authority, and publish'd for the Use of all Generations.

From this *general View of Ordinances*, as necessary to our present Condition, proceed we now to a more *special Consideration of the two Particulars* which were just mentioned and propounded to you towards the Close of my last Discourse upon this Subject,

I. The Insufficiency of the strictest Adherence to God's *Commandments*, without an uniform Regard to his *Ordinances* also. In the

II. *Second Place*, the Inefficacy of a *partial Regard to these Ordinances*, when it is paid to one, or more only, and not to all of them.

The following Views will set the first of these Particulars in a sufficient Light.

1. That

I. That *Rituals* are the most proper Tests of our Obedience to God's *Authority*, which *Morals* are not always; now without a Regard to the Authority of God, *as such*, *Morals* themselves will never be preserv'd in Purity, never meet with an uniform or general Observance from us. For it hath already been remark'd in the Course of this Argument, that most of the Instances in *Moral Duty* have somewhat to be pleaded for them, from the Topics of their own *intrinsic* Usefulness and Convenience, and of some *present* Mischief attending the Transgression of them. So that apart from the Consideration of God's *Authority*, a good deal of Reason may be urged on the Behalf of them, from Views of a different Nature, which yet will not secure an *universal* Obedience to them in *all* Examples. Whereas a Regard to God's *Authority* will secure it in *all*, as being stamp'd upon all alike; and *no* Principle *but that* will carry us thro' the whole Range and Compass of all our Obligations. Whatever then shall be found best fitted to obtain from



us a reverential Acknowledgment of God's Authority, will at the same Time appear best fitted to obtain from us an *uniform* Obedience to *all* his *Commandments*. Now *Rituals* subsist entirely upon this, as their sole Foundation; since there can be no rational View in our nicest Regard to them, but only as such Regard exhibits a Specimen of our Submissiveness to his Will and Pleasure who enjoin'd the Use of them. For this pins us down to a close and intimate Sense of our Dependence upon, and our Attachment to him, whose *Authority* over us we recognize hereby, and practically confess our Subjection to it: Which seems a fair Account of that positive Appointment prescribed to our first Parents in their State of Innocence. Some authentic Recognition of his Right to command their Service, God did even *then* think it proper to insist upon; of such Moment and Consequence was *that* Principle of Obedience, that he thought fit to establish it by a Sanction, the Force of which, and the Penalty

nalty of breaking in upon it, should be felt and acknowledged by all succeeding Generations. And indeed some *ritual* Observance was not only for them the *fittest*, but in a Manner the *only* Test, which their Obedience, at that Time, could well be put upon. The relative Duties in *moral* Life were few in Number, when there were only two Persons in the World to practise them; who could not easily transgress the Obligations of Justice or Mercy, when there were no Distresses nor Wants to exercise the Compassions of the *one*, nor any Propriety or mutual Commerce to employ the Weights or Measures of the *other*. Nor could there be much Temptation to infringe the Laws of Temperance and Mediocrity, when *Nature* had not yet wanton'd in luxurious *Arts*, when Appetite was yet a Stranger to undue Indulgences, and Passion had then broke out into no rebellious Encroachments upon Reason. The Sense of their Dependence upon the God, who had so lately form'd them, was the only

only Article which seem'd to want any Preservative or Security. And for *that* the fresh Memory of their Birth and Being might seem to have promised a competent Provision. But lest it should not prove so, it was guarded with the additional Fence of *one*, and *only one*, *Ceremonial* Institution, or *positive* Restraint; as *one* at that Time and Juncture might well indeed have been thought sufficient. But when a remoter Distance from the Original of Things, with farther Excesses of Appetite and Passion, had weaken'd in the Minds of Men the Sense of their Dependence, and of their due Subjection to the God of Heaven, more Institutions and Forms were occasionally thrown into their Scheme of Religion, by Way of farther Security to God's *Commandments*, and to the Reverence which it was expected that Men should entertain for them. The whole *Process* of the *Fact*, as well as the *Reason* of the *Thing* informs us, how fit Preservatives *Rituals* are to *Morals*, by serving in a peculiar Manner



Manner as Tests of our Obedience, and as Proofs of our Subjection to the sacred *Authority* of our great Lawgiver.

But I proceed to take Notice

2. *Secondly*, That even the *strictest* Observance, which hath ever in Fact been paid to the *Commandments* of God, is and hath ever been, *less strict* than it should be, and therefore stands, and hath always stood in need of *Ordinances*, to point out an Atonement, and to direct us in the Methods of suing out our Pardon.

Natural Light, tho' it might and did instruct Mankind in the *Necessity*, could never yet assure to them the *Efficacy* or *Sufficiency* of penitential Sorrow for the Pardon of Sin, or for the Cure of the Guilt contracted by it: And therefore in Fact they never depended on, never acquiesced in it; but resorted to various Forms of *Sacrifice* and *Expiation*, look'd out for *Mediators* and Intercessors with the supreme Being, and rather than they would trust themselves with the *naked* Duty of *Repentance*, plunged into all the  
Excess

Excess of *Rituals*, which *Fancy* could invent for them or the most abandon'd *Superstition* patronize. The best Circumstance in their *Repentance* they might easily discern was a greater Measure of Care in their future *Obedience*; whilst yet even the *highest* Degree which they could hope to rise up to in their future *Obediences*, was and would be ever lower than it should be, and so would stand in need of a fresh *Repentance*. Thus, instead of cancelling the *old* Debt by the best of their Services, they might clearly see, that they could only contract a *new* one. Upon this Plan of Reasoning from the Circumstances then allotted to them, it was natural for them to look out beyond themselves for some *saving Help*, and to *feel after God* if haply they might find him, in any Resorts to *Ordinances* which either Custom had adopted, or Credulity recommended, or the Vanity of human Imagination represented proper and expedient. *Morals* alone, as practised or practicable upon the Foot of our present Situation, have been

been always too weak and too imperfect in us, to answer the Demands of Providence, or the Dignity of its Government; and the general Sense of Mankind in all Ages, in all the Periods and Forms of Religion which have been ever known to us, hath panted for Relief under this pressing Article, and earnestly sought after the Methods of Reconciliation. In this Condition the Gospel found us, sensible of some Want, attempting (in vain attempting) to supply it, and labouring by all the little Arts which Fear or Fancy could suggest, to appease and to approach with Acceptance, an offended superior Power.

Thus we know that the whole Creation Rom. viii.  
groaned and travailed in Pain together, <sup>22.</sup>

till the Revelation of God by his Son clear'd up our Doubts, and ascertain'd our Hopes, and fix'd the Terms of our Forgiveness by an authentic Declaration, that tho' all have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God, yet they are justified freely by his Grace thro' the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom

Rom. iii.  
<sup>23, 24, 25.</sup>

God



*God hath set forth to be a Propitiation, thro' Faith in his Blood, to declare his Righteousness for the Remission of Sins, that are past, thro' the Forbearance of God.*

Did Heathen Theology look out then for a Propitiation; and shall we, when it is offered us, despise or neglect it? Was the *Gentile* World solicitous to find the Methods of approaching the Objects of their Worship acceptably; and shall we, when they are revealed to us, dispute or contradict them? It doth not appear that there is more amongst us, either of natural Talent, or of acquired Improvement, than what the Sages of those Times were severally possessed of. Now they went in the Persuasions and Practices of the Times they lived in, upon Reasons much less conclusive than what may now be urged with Regard to the Particulars, which have here been mentioned. So that in the Contempt of *Ordinances*, they lose Sight of common Sense, who would seem to have attained the most *uncom-*

mon Share of it. By contradicting the Notions which *at present* are received, they contradict the Notions which have *always* been received. For whoever shall agree with us in the general Doctrine of *Forms and Ordinances*, can have little or no Objection to the particular Institutions of the Christian Scheme. All which are founded, either in the Reason of Things, or in the prevailing Sentiments of Mankind concerning them, or in some peculiar Relation born by them to the great Transactions between God and Man in *Christ Jesus*. For Example,

I. *First*, To begin, where our own and all Religions have begun, with initiatory Rites: This Rite in the *Jewish* Ordinal was *Circumcision*, to which in the Case of Profelytes was afterwards added *Baptism*: In the *Gentile* Religion, the Forms of this were as various, as the Objects of their Worship into whose Service their Votaries were severally initiated: Our Saviour retain'd the plain and simple Ceremony of *Baptism*, which he  
I found

found in Use, for entering his Converts upon their new Profession. Now would any Man in his Wits object to such an harmless Institution, when a Ceremonial of some Sort or other hath ever been the constant Practice of Mankind upon like Occasions?

2. Thus again in the Sacrament of his *last Supper*, which was intended to perpetuate the Memory of his all-attoning Sacrifice, and to preserve in us a constant and lively Sense of that mighty Benefit, which he conferred upon us by his Expiation of our (otherwise) uncanceled Guilt; In this, I say, there was nothing new but the *Circumstance* only; for the *Substance* was before, tho' indeed but obscurely, pointed to, in the Lustrations and Sacrifices of the *Heathen Ritual*, and in the various Attone-ments of the *Jewish Law*; as in Fact it was current universal Usage, to perpetuate the Remembrance of public and signal Benefits by some pertinent and solemn Ceremonial: Wherefore, since there is nothing here unnatural or shocking



shocking, nothing but what the Reason of the Case, and the constant Practice of all Ages, as well as the particular Appointment of our Lord and Saviour, will be found to authorize; the Neglect of our Attendance upon this solemn Ordinance will be chargeable upon Causes we ought to be ashamed of, whilst we profess the Gospel, *viz.* that we either slight its Blessings, or live in Opposition to the main Tenor of his Laws. Farther yet; and

3. The Worship of God thro' *Christ* our Mediator, hath somewhat in it so congenial to the Sentiments of Mankind, as far and widely as we are able to trace them, that here we differ in nothing from universal Practice, but in the great Advantage and Security we have, that ours is an *authorized* Intercessor, *and able to save to the uttermost them who come unto God by him.* Either a Consciousness of their Weakness, or a Sense of their Guilt, or the exalted Notions which Men had entertained of

the supreme Being, did evermore direct their Resorts to some friendly mediatorial Powers, whose Interest they supposed to be better than their own in him, and which they pray'd might be employ'd in their Favour with the Court of Heaven. This was an Usage, which had Truth and Reason to support the Main of it, and was founded in all Likelihood, upon some common Tradition from the Original of Things; though the *Rise* of it was forgotten; and in the *Process* of it, 'twas cover'd with Rubbish, and darkened with Superstition. But the Practice is now brought back to its genuine Meaning, and re-instated in its proper Order; the Person of this much-wanted Mediator is pointed out and ascertained, and all other Resorts of this Kind are forbidden to us.

Thus in the Institutions which seem most peculiar to the *Ritual* of the Gospel, we may observe the Basis of them fixed a good deal earlier than its actual

actual Promulgation, and their Out-lines drawn upon all the Forms of Religion over the Face of the whole Earth. So that if we do not object to *Ordinances* in the gross and *general*, (and if we do, we object to the universal Sense of Mankind in all Ages of the World, and in all the Periods of Religious Worship) to these in *particular* we can have no just Exception; which have so much the Nature of Things to favour them, the Usage of the World to recommend them, and an undoubted Authority to enjoin them. Again,

4. The *Worship* of God by *public* and *private* Applications to him in the Offices of solemn Devotion, hath so strong a Tendency to imprint upon our Minds just Sentiments of our *Dependence*; and those Sentiments of our *Dependence* are such Guards upon our *Obedience*; that as no *Religion* did ever *subsist* without it, so, I presume, no serious *Professor* of any Religion will ever *except* against it.



5. Meditation upon the Will and the Word of God by hearing it discoursed to you, and by considering it for yourselves, at proper Seasons of Leisure and Retirement; the pointing out these Seasons to your more especial Notice, and the public Regard which is paid to them by a general Cessation from common Business, are so apparently subservient to the great *Ends* of Religion, to the Improvement of Piety and of all Virtue; that the *mere Moralists, as such*, should not fail to befriend them, nor to give them the Countenance of his own Example.

6. The Priesthood, or an Order of Men set apart by some solemn *Ceremonial* for the more regular Performance of Divine Offices, hath been a constant Usage in all the *Formularies* of Religion; tho' the Manner of conveying the several Powers assigned to the Function in *different Times and Places* hath (it is confessed) been *different*. But every Scheme of Religion hath always had some Rule for the Conveyance

Conveyance of such Powers; from which any *voluntary* Departure hath been ever censured as *irregular* and *presumptuous*. And indeed the Nature of the Thing requires here an Enclosure; to prevent that Confusion which must needs arise from a promiscuous Allowance of *all*, or *any* Ministrations.

Wherefore, when *Revelation* chimes in with the Voice of *Reason*, and points out a Method to us for keeping this Matter within Rule and Order; when the *Form* of it hath been convey'd to us, thro' all successive Generations, and the different *Degrees* in this Ministry appear upon the same Records and Evidences, which notify to us the *Rule of our Faith* itself, and are Vouchers to the Canon of Holy Scripture; I cannot imagine why we, as *Christians*, should be less solicitous for ours, than the *Jews*, than the *Heathens* were, than the Votaries of *all* Religions have ever been, for the Honour of *their* Priesthood, and for the Appropriation of its respective Offices to Persons duly in-

notul L 1 3 vested

vested with the Right of discharging them. To conclude this Head;

7. All innocent Modes and Circumstances of *human* Appointment; such as, the Times and Places, the Habits and Gestures of public Worship; the Seasons of solemn Humiliation or Thanksgiving; the Forms, and other Regulations of Things indifferent in the Service of God; in fine, whatever of this Sort may be judged conducive to his Honour, or to the Benefit of human Society, whether in stated, or occasional Injunctions, by the Persons entrusted with the Care of prescribing them; all these, methinks, might easily be allowed to pass with us under the *general* View of those *Commandments* or *Ordinances*, which have recommended to us a Spirit of Peace and Piety, and of Submission to them who *have the Rule over us*. In such Cases, to scan each Article with a nice and critical Scrupulosity, hath too much the Appearance of a froward contentious Temper, and of a perverse Resolution



lution to dispute by Inches the Ground of our Obedience.

The *Jewish* Ordinal was much more particular than the *Christian*, in settling the minutest Formularies of the Worship prescribed by it, and yet we find in diverse Examples, (in *stated* Instances, as well as in *occasional*) that *human Authority* discretionally interposed with that People; prescribed what God had not directly prescribed to them, and even insisted upon those *new*, those *human* Injunctions, as *Terms* of their *Communion*. We read of no Opposition from any of their Members, or their Profelytes, to the Feast of *Purim*, which <sup>Est. ix. 27.</sup> was a *mere human* Ordinance; and yet <sup>Est.</sup> none might join themselves to them who would not observe it. Their Feast of *Dedication* was in like Manner of *human* Appointment; so was their Baptism of Profelytes, and the *Postcænum*, or After-past of their most solemn Festivals; none of which were condemned by our Saviour, even when he was most keen in his Opposition to that *ritual*

Spirit, which he found over-much prevailing with them. On the contrary; he adopted two of these *human* Institutions, fix'd them as standing Ordinances of his Church, and transplanted them into his own more *spiritual* Dispensation.

Thus we have seen, that either as *Tests of our Obedience*, or as *Helps to our Repentance*, or as *Indulgences* to a Bent we have always stood inclined to, the Ordinances of God, as well as his *Commandments*, have a Claim to our Observance; that it is not enough to walk in the *one*, without walking in the *other* also. I am only now to add upon the

II. *Second Particular* of this General Head, that it is not enough to walk in *some* of these Ordinances only, without walking in *all* of them. For,

1. *First*, As *Tests of our Obedience* they can never answer the End design'd by them, if we take a Liberty of departing, in any Instance whatsoever, from them. The same Authority is alike concerned for *all* of them, the same Spirit which  
said,

said; *Repent and be baptized*, by the Acts ii. 38.  
 Mouth of *St. Peter*; the same Spirit  
 which hath directed us *in every thing* by Phil. iv. 6.  
*Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiv-*  
*ing* to let our *Requests be made known*  
*unto God*, by the Mouth of *St. Paul*,  
 said also by the Mouth of our Saviour,  
*This do in Remembrance of me.* In fine, Luk. xxii. 19.  
 the same Spirit which directed the ear-  
 liest Followers of his Gospel to assemble  
 themselves together *on the first Day of the*  
*Week*, for hearing his Word, pointed  
 to them the Duties of *breaking Bread*  
 and of *Prayers*. So that if the Autho-  
 rity of our Law-giver be any Reason  
 to us for observing *one or more* of his  
 sacred Institutions, it will be a Reason  
 equally conclusive with us for obser-  
 ving *all* of them. And if this be not  
 our Motive, if *Credit*, or *Convenience*,  
 if the *Employment of an idle Hour*, if the  
*Custom* and the *Fashion* of Life, be our  
 decisive Inducements for attending up-  
 on this or that *Ordinance of the Lord*, and  
 leaving the rest neglected; upon the  
 Views of Religion, it were even as  
 well, if *none* of them were observ'd by  
 us



us. Because from our Neglect of this or that, it is too apparent, that *none* of them have any Hold of us upon a firm or a proper Principle. It is *God's Authority* which is the just Foundation of our Obedience to any *one* of them; and this is a Reason alike extensive to them all. But

2. Besides the *Extrinsic* Reason of *divine Authority*, we have seen that there is somewhat of an *Intrinsic* cleaving to each of them. So that we follow neither the *Reason of Things*, nor the *Authority of our great Lawgiver*, when we will pick and chuse for our selves any favourite Articles of Obedience, either to the *Commandments* or *Ordinances* of God. For Example, That Part, and that Time in our public Assemblies for his Worship, which are allotted to the Offices of *Prayer and Thanksgiving* have at least as much of *intrinsic* Reason to be pleaded for them, as those which are assigned to *Hearing and Meditation*. And yet our *Ears*, 'tis manifest, are often *itching*, whilst our *Hearts* are cold and indolent; the one a great deal more fond  
of

of *Hearing*, than the other of prompting us to *perform* our Duty. Again, it is not more evident in Fact, that the *first Day of the Week*, from the earliest Times of the Gospel, was sacred to the Purposes of solemn Worship, than it is that such Worship was, for the main, *Eucharistical* [or Sacramental] and never omitted the Memorial of our Saviour's Passion. Yet how strange would this *Doctrine* sound, should it be pressed upon you; and how much stranger would this *Practice* be, should a Revival of it be now attempted?

In fine, it is a melancholly Reflexion, which the Truth of Facts obliges me to make upon the general Process of common Life, that we seldom form our Estimate of Things upon the just and intrinsic *Reason* of them but we form it upon Caprice and Humour, upon Custom or Fancy, upon careless, loose, superficial Enquiries, or perhaps upon none at all, upon the Peculiarity of our Taste or the Course of our Education, upon the Genius of our Company or of the Party we are most attach'd to; Views  
which

which have all a wrong Turn in them, and in one Instance or other, will mislead us wretchedly !

The *Rule of Right* to us is the *Will of God*, which will appear in his *Oracles*, upon a due Resort to them. And the proper *Range of Duties*, their *Precedency* and their *Subordination*, what is *first* and what is *last* in them, are *Lessons* which will be easily legible in the two great *Volumes of Reason and Revelation*, by all who are seriously disposed to learn them. For the rest, the *Hypocrite* and *Profane*, the *Formalist* and *Enthusiast*, have divided the World amongst them ; and in their several Ways of *opposing* or *undermining* true Religion, have left us in the Result a very scanty Portion of it. For thro' setting *Commandments* at Variance with *Ordinances*, or thro' putting up *Ordinances* in Opposition to *Commandments*, the *Power of Godliness* is by *some* neglected, the *Form* of it ridiculed by *others*, and so in *this* Way, or in *that*, both *Form* and *Power* are grievous Sufferers. Small is the Prospect of any *human* Cure for a Distemper which  
seems



seems to lye at the very Root of our Beings, and whose ugly Symptoms have been ever found upon Religion, in all its Periods, and under all its Dispensations. *Our Help* in this Case can be expected *only from the Lord who made Heaven and Earth*: Wherefore to *him* let us humbly apply, in the wise and sober Devotions of our Church.

*Almighty and merciful God, of whose only Gift it cometh, that thy faithful People do unto thee true and laudable Service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this Life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly Promises, thro' the Merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*The End of the Second Volume.*



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